



Diarrhea in Cats and Dogs (9 weeks and older)

There are many causes of diarrhea in cats and dogs. Some, like stress and diet changes, are simple and easy to fix. Others, like inflammatory bowel disease, are more complicated to diagnose and treat. Diarrhea is not exactly a very rewarding part of being a foster caregiver, but having a good plan makes things much easier. Using the Purina Fecal Scoring System and knowing what to look for when examining diarrhea enables foster caregivers to evaluate the situation. Recognizing when veterinary attention is needed and understanding what can be done at home gives a set of tools to address the problem.

Purina Fecal Scoring System

- The [Purina Fecal Scoring System](#) is a commonly used, photo-based chart that gives a numeric score based on how soft or hard a fecal sample is. This scoring system is useful for describing diarrhea to the foster manager and for monitoring whether diarrhea is resolving.
 - A score of 1 is given to poop that is too hard. This is what you may see in a cat or dog who is constipated.
 - A score of 2 is also on the firm side.
 - A score of 3 is considered normal.
 - Soft stool is given a score of 4.
 - Mild diarrhea is a 5.
 - A score of 6 is moderate diarrhea.
 - Severe, watery diarrhea is given a 7.

What to Look for in Diarrhea

- How many times has your foster pet had diarrhea?
- Is it a small, moderate, or large amount?
- Look at the color of the diarrhea. Is it bloody or blood-tinged?
- Check for worms. Some intestinal parasites, like roundworms and tapeworms, are visible in the stool.
- Always examine poop for foreign bodies such as bones, rope, plastic, pieces of toys, and so forth!

- Be sure to save poop containing worms or foreign bodies for the veterinary team to examine.

When to Contact the Foster Manager

- Soft stool or diarrhea is commonly seen with dietary changes or stress caused by new environments. In these cases, it may be best to be patient and continue to monitor. But in some instances, diarrhea is a more serious concern, and it's important to seek immediate or emergency veterinary care. You should contact the foster manager when:
 - Diarrhea does not resolve within 1-2 days.
 - Diarrhea becomes more frequent or the amount increases.
 - Diarrhea is accompanied by other symptoms, like lethargy, decreased appetite, dehydration, or vomiting.
 - Diarrhea is bloody or watery.
 - Diarrhea contains worms, or foreign bodies.
 - You have any concerns or questions. It's better to be safe than sorry.

What Foster Caregivers Can Do at Home

- Gather History
 - Gathering history for the veterinary team can help them determine what is causing the diarrhea.
 - Have there been any recent changes in the diet? If so, what food was being fed before and after?
 - Have there been any environmental changes, like new pets or people moving in, or unusual loud noises?
 - Is your foster pet on any medications, like anti-inflammatories or antibiotics, that can upset the stomach and cause diarrhea?
 - Is there evidence of ingestion of people food, garbage, pieces of toys, or anything like that?
 - Has the diarrhea and any other symptoms gotten better, worse, or stayed the same since first seen?
- Save a Poop Sample
 - Save a poop sample for the veterinary team to examine and test.
 - It should be as fresh as possible, preferably less than 12 hours old, but no more than 24.
 - The sample needs to be kept refrigerated until it can be brought to the shelter or rescue group.
 - It can be difficult to collect a poop sample when diarrhea is on the watery side. Try to get as much solid as possible.



- Give Probiotics
 - Probiotics are live bacteria that help clear up diarrhea.
 - Fortiflora®, Proviabile®, and BeneBac® Plus are all commonly used brands of probiotics.
 - Some advice...do not use yogurt. It contains too much calcium to be used as a probiotic, and most yogurt does not contain enough bacteria to be considered a probiotic.
 - To learn more, see the Maddie's Probiotics Educational Handout.
- Encourage Water Intake
 - If there is diarrhea but no vomiting, encourage water intake.
 - Use pet water fountains and place additional bowls of fresh water around the house.
 - Feed watered-down canned food.
 - With cats, you can offer juice from a can of salmon or tuna, either by itself or mixed with canned food. You can also entice them to play with and drink running water from faucets.
- Daily Assessment
 - Daily Assessment is important. This will allow you to monitor whether diarrhea is getting better, worse, or staying the same. It is also important to watch for additional symptoms like vomiting, loss of appetite, lethargy, and dehydration.
 - To learn more about how to monitor for signs of illness or stress, how to check for dehydration, and what to do in an emergency, see these Maddie's flash classes:
 - Maddie's Daily Assessment of Foster Pets
 - Maddie's How to Check Foster Pets for Dehydration
 - [Maddie's Emergencies in Cats and Dogs \(5 weeks and older\)](#)
- Give Medications and Special Diets
 - Give medications and special diets as directed by a veterinarian.
 - Metronidazole and de-wormers are common medications used to treat diarrhea. Do not discontinue them too early, even if the diarrhea has resolved. Finish out the prescription to help prevent recurrence of the diarrhea.
 - Additional fiber helps firm up the poop. Canned pumpkin can temporarily be mixed in with the pet's regular food. Be sure to use plain canned pumpkin only, not pumpkin pie mix or spiced pumpkin mix.
 - There are also high fiber veterinary prescription diets like Hill's® W/D, Purina® OM, and Royal Canin® Gastrointestinal Fiber Response.
 - Other diets may be needed, like low residue or hypoallergenic diets.
 - If your pet is on a prescription diet, it is important to avoid feeding other foods and treats unless instructed to do so by a veterinarian. Feeding anything other than the prescription diet, in many cases, defeats the purpose of giving it in the first place.

