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CONSTIPATION

DEFINITION: A constipated animal will pass less than 1 stool every other day, and will be straining and uncomfortable when attempting to have a bowel movement. A constipated pet may have watery diarrhea around the impacted stool.

CAUSES: The causes are many and varied as anything that causes prolonged retention of feces in the colon, can result in constipation. For example;

- * Dietary: bones, hair, foreign material
- * Environment: lack of exercise or mobility, stress (boarding, change of litterbox)
- * Pain on Defecation: trauma such as fractures or bites, diseases of the anal area
- * Obstruction: tumors, prostatic disease, matted hair
- * Neurological: spinal disease, idiopathic megacolon (common in cats)

MANAGEMENT:

1. **Remove the underlying cause if possible.**
2. **Ensure animal is well-hydrated** – if they have not been drinking or vomiting, they should be given intravenous or subcutaneous fluids. It is not safe to administer laxatives and enemas to a dehydrated animal.
3. **Laxatives:** Come in many, many types:
 - (a) **Stool Softeners type laxatives:**
 - * Emollients: These non-prescription drugs act as detergents to soften the feces by mixing water and fat and are most useful short term to decrease straining. (i.e. Colace; active ingredient is docusate or DSS)
 - * Lubricants: These drugs soften the feces by coating them to prevent water loss and promote easy expulsion. They are petroleum oil products, such as mineral oil, Vaseline and the flavored feline hairball remedies.
 - (b) **Bulk forming type laxatives:** These are most suitable for chronic use to prevent constipation and include bran, psyllium (Metamucil) and canned pumpkin.
 - (c) **Stimulant Laxatives** – Work on the nerves of the bowel to stimulate pushing. Long term use can damage the nerves of the bowel. (i.e. Dulcolax, active ingredient bisacodyl)

(d) **Osmotic Agents** – Work by pulling water into the colon to soften the stools. Too much will cause diarrhea. The sugar in milk (lactose) has that effect on many pets, but the more effective is the non-prescription drug lactulose. Also PEG (polyethelene glycate) is a powder that is both a soluble fibre source and laxative and can be added to canned food.

4. **Cisapride** – This drug is not a laxative. It is used in cats with megacolon to help stimulate the nerves of the colon. Because it is banned in humans, it requires formulation from a compounding pharmacy.
5. **Enemas** – We use enemas in clinic and have individual small enemas for at home use if necessary.
6. **Diet** – Fiber is the mainstay of prevention of constipation. It helps to soften the stool and the increased volume of feces stimulates better bowel movements. W/D by Hills is one of the best diets on the market for managing constipation. In cats with megacolon, a low fiber, low fat diet could be tried. Also feeding canned food or soaking the dry food in water can help increase water consumption and prevent flare-ups.
7. **Environment** – Regular exercise and drinking lots of fresh water will help tremendously. Also grooming to prevent hairballs and not feeding bones.