# What is vomiting? What is regurgitation? And why is that important?

# What is vomiting?

Vomiting is an **active reflex mechanism** to expel unwanted items of food or toxins from the body after they have been ingested. So this is something that the body has developed as a form of mechanism of protection. It is an active process, which means that active muscle movements are involved. In dogs and cats, this is usually preceded by an interval of nausea ("feeling sick"), which can manifest in being restless, walking around with a tucked in belly (cramps or pain), lip smacking or licking, excessive drooling, sometimes even vocalisation (especially in cats). Then there is the phase of active expulsion of stomach content, which is characterise by muscle contractions of the stomach and the abdominal wall. The animals usually stand or lie with the neck stretched out and "heaving" or "retching" sounds can be heard. In cats, this can sometimes be really difficult to differentiate from coughing. It usually ends with a "final retch" and the bringing up of stomach content. This can be food, liquid, mucus/ slime or bile (green or yellow colour) as well as blood (which can be red when its "fresh" and black/ like coffee grounds when it is "digested").

# What is regurgitation?

In contrary to vomiting, regurgitation in small animals is a **passive process**. It is usually due to problems of the oesophagus (the food pipe). Animals do not show nausea or unwellness before bringing up food, water or mucus and they don’t always seem to be "bothered" by it. They more or less passively "spit out" some content and are normal afterwards. The typical "heaving" and "retching" seen with vomiting is missing!

# Why is the differentiation important?

Differentiating between vomiting and regurgitation is important as their respective causes are completely different, hence diagnostic tests necessary differ widely. Regurgitation is usually a problem of the oesophagus (food pipe), which means that radiographs of the area, live swallowing studies or endoscopy of the oesophagus might be necessary. On the other hand, vomiting can be caused by a plethora of diseases both inside and outside the gastrointestinal tract, hence investigations are usually broader, looking for many different organ functions, but can also involve looking at the stomach and the gut with a camera (endoscopy).

# What should I do if I suspect my pet is regurgitating?

You should see your vet and clearly describe the clinical signs that you are observing. It might help the vet enormously if you can differentiate between vomiting and regurgitation to guide further testing.

# The DIGEST clinic team

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