# A guide to gut problems in small animals

# What are common signs of gut problems in dogs and cats?

The most common gut problems in dogs and cats are vomiting, diarrhoea, and weight loss. Diarrhoea can be divided into small intestinal diarrhoea (watery diarrhoea, can be pale, normal coloured or black; the latter being a sign of bleeding into the gut) and large intestinal diarrhoea (animals strain to defecate, only pass small amounts of stools, can be painful upon passing, there can be fresh blood or mucus).

# What to do if my dog or cat has acute vomiting or diarrhoea?

Acute vomiting has many different causes, from harmless ones (eaten something unbecoming) to serious (blockage of the gut due to swallowed foreign object like for example a toy or a sock). If your animal shows vomiting and is also weak/ lethargic, shows pain/ cramps, does not want to eat, and cannot keep anything down (food nor water), this could be an emergency, so please contact a vet and seek help as soon as possible. Acute unproductive vomiting or retching, especially in large or giant dog breeds can be a sign of a twisted stomach (gastric dilation volvulus = GDV), which is a surgical emergency. Again, please contact a vet immediately. Acute diarrhoea on the other hand is in many cases "self-limiting", which means that it passes without any need for treatment. Especially if your pet is otherwise well, you might be able to wait 24 to 48 hours to see if it improves by itself. However, if your dog or cat becomes unwell, lethargic, develops other clinical signs or the diarrhoea does not resolve, please see your vet for further advice.

# What to do if my dog or cat has chronic vomiting or diarrhoea?

"Chronic" in the medical sense means to be present for longer than 3 weeks. However, if diarrhoea is going on for longer than 1 week or associated with lethargy/ weakness, lack of appetite, pain or severe vomiting so that your pet cannot keep anything "down" you should seek veterinary help earlier than that. Vomiting can be a sign of a serious disease and be an emergency (obstruction of the intestines with a foreign body, organ failure, life-threatening hormone diseases), so with vomiting that does not subside, you should seek veterinary advice.

# When do I need to get worried with weight loss?

Weight loss is a very unspecific sign that can be caused by many diseases. If the weight loss is intentional, please see a veterinary nutritionist for best advice on what rate of weight loss is the goal for your individual pet (too rapid weight loss or drop in food intake can especially in cats cause severe liver problems called hepatic lipidosis). If you have recently changed your pets food, that might be a cause of weight loss due to lack of appropriate calorie intake. Make sure that you feed the right amount for your pet's target weight, and seek advice from a nutritionist if unsure. Being less keen to eat can be caused by teeth problems, this should be investigated at your vets. However, if no obvious cause is found, your vet might recommend several blood tests or diagnostic imaging procedures to find a possible cause. There are some blood parameters that can inform about if your pet can still "take up" enough nutrients from the gut (for example tests for pancreas diseases and certain vitamin levels in the blood). If an animal has lost weight rapidly and unintentionally, or a significant percentage of his/her normal body weight (usually 5-10%), then there might be a more sinister reason, and you should seek your vet's advice.

