

Protracted Vomiting in Dogs and Cats

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This presentation will provide a comprehensive overview of the diagnostic approach and medical management of Protracted Vomiting in dogs and cats, emphasizing both the underlying physiology of the vomiting reflex and the practical application of antiemetic therapy. We will begin by examining the complex neurophysiology of the emetic pathway, including the roles of the chemoreceptor trigger zone, the vomiting center, vagal afferents, and the gastrointestinal tract. By outlining how these systems interact to initiate and sustain vomiting, we can better understand the mechanisms by which commonly used antiemetic drugs exert their effects. Specific attention will be given to the pharmacologic targets of maropitant, ondansetron, metoclopramide, and other agents, highlighting where each drug interrupts the emetic cascade and how these mechanisms inform clinical decision-making.

From this physiological foundation, the discussion transitions to the clinical scenarios in which vomiting becomes protracted or refractory. Persistent vomiting is not a diagnosis but a symptom that demands a structured and thoughtful approach. We will explore how to tailor anti-emetic therapy based on the suspected origin of the vomiting - central, peripheral, inflammatory, obstructive, or metabolic—and how to combine or sequence medications to maximize therapeutic benefit while minimizing adverse effects. Considerations such as hydration status, electrolyte abnormalities, and nutritional support will also be addressed, as these factors often influence both the severity of vomiting and the patient's response to treatment. The presentation then focuses on diseases commonly associated with drug-resistant or persistent vomiting. These include gastrointestinal foreign bodies, obstructive bowel disease, and inflammatory conditions of the stomach and small intestine such as gastritis, enteritis, and inflammatory bowel disease. Viral infections, including parvoviral and panleukopenia-associated gastroenteritis, will be discussed in the context of their profound inflammatory and systemic effects. Additionally, we will examine food-responsive enteropathies and hypersensitivity reactions, emphasizing how immune-mediated mechanisms can drive severe vomiting and how dietary modification or immunomodulatory therapy may be required alongside antiemetic support. Finally, we will review the diagnostic strategies essential for identifying the underlying cause of protracted vomiting. This includes a stepwise approach to laboratory testing, imaging modalities such as radiography and ultrasound, endoscopic evaluation, and when to consider exploratory surgery. The goal is to provide clinicians with a practical framework that balances efficiency, cost, and diagnostic yield. We will conclude by integrating diagnostic findings with therapeutic planning, demonstrating how to use antiemetic medications judiciously and effectively while pursuing a definitive diagnosis and treatment.

Overall, this presentation aims to equip practitioners with a deeper understanding of the vomiting reflex, a more nuanced approach to anti-emetic therapy, and a clear diagnostic roadmap for managing one of the most common and challenging clinical problems in small animal practice.