



WHAT GOES DOWN ...

SOMETIMES COMES BACK UP. A LOOK AT THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF CAT VOMIT

BY MICHAEL SHARP // ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID POHL

I WAS STANDING IN THE KITCHEN making a sandwich the other morning when I heard that fateful sound.

Hhualck. Hhualck. Hhhhuuuuaaaalllck.

I know this sound well.

I tossed the peanut butter toward the counter and raced around the corner to find my orange tabby, Bosley, sitting on the matching ottoman to my fiancée's favorite chair, preparing to send his breakfast back. Time ground down like one of those slow-motion movie scenes as I implored him—*Nooooooooooooo!!!!*—to save the wedding by just sliding over and aiming for the hardwood floor instead.

He declined, promptly throwing up all over the double pewter polyester. And as he hopped down and I swung into emergency cleanup mode, I couldn't help but picture the two of us living on the streets, with only a stained ottoman to protect us from the elements.

Oh, Bosley. I'll give him this: He keeps me on my toes. And as most cat owners know, every so often you might come home to a similar surprise on the windowsill or those freshly washed sheets on your bed. You grab the paper towels, you flip on the cold water, you deal. Your cat is worth it. Unquestionably.

For years, I just assumed these little "surprises" were due to a

sensitive stomach—"Barfin' Boz," as my dad calls him. (His cat, by the way, almost never throws up. So sometimes you win that lottery.) But recently I started wondering: Well, how often is too often? Is there anything I could be doing to cut down on the vomiting? And in the case of the ottoman: HOW THE HECK DO I GET THIS MARK OUT BEFORE SHE GETS HOME?!

"When I would counsel new clients who have never had a cat before, I would oftentimes make them aware that sometimes cats vomit—and it's typically more frequently than dogs," says Susan Krebsbach, a veterinary adviser with the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association.

"Oftentimes it's due to either eating too quickly or hairballs. But the one thing that's really important to remember is that if a guardian has any concern about the amount of vomiting or the type of vomiting, they should see their veterinarian because it's impossible to diagnose over the phone."

Indeed, vomiting can be a symptom of many problems, ranging across a wide swath of severities: low-quality food or treats, food allergies, a gastrointestinal issue, a foreign body like a swallowed string, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, even organ failure.

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"Frequent vomiting is not normal," stresses Nancy Peterson, HSUS cat programs manager. "A vomit here and there, OK. But frequent vomiting—and by that I might say every day, or several times a day—something's probably wrong."

So, again, if you have concerns, contact your veterinarian. And to better help pinpoint the cause, you can also do a little detective work at home. Among the key questions to start with: Did your cat just eat? Did you recently switch foods? Is there a clump of fur in the middle of what came back up? And perhaps most important: How is your cat behaving otherwise?

"The one thing I always look at," Krebsbach says, "is what is happening *in addition* to the vomiting. For example, is the cat lethargic? Is his or her appetite decreased? What does the vomit look like? If it's undigested food, and the cat is otherwise acting normally, it is often caused by the cat eating too quickly."

I know Bosley's been guilty of this. The first few times we fed him wet food, he scarfed it all down, turned around, took two steps, then launched it all right back up. This can also happen in multi-cat households, Peterson notes, when one cat speeds through her own dinner, then hovers over another cat while she eats.

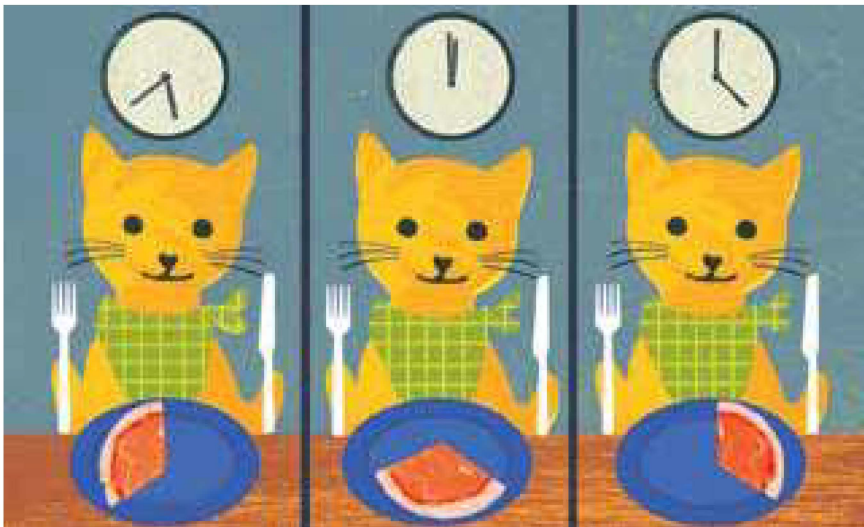
So, a few tricks: Try feeding your cat smaller, more frequent servings. Krebsbach also suggests spreading the food over a flat surface—like a plate—rather than in a bowl, forcing your cat to take smaller bites. Another tip: Put a golf ball in the middle of that plate, so that your cat must slow down to move the object out of the way. And if one cat is racing through his meal much faster than the other, try feeding them in separate rooms.

If you're finding a clump of fur in the vomit, chances are you're dealing with hairballs. Krebsbach suggests a hairball medication such as Laxatone, which you can administer by rubbing it across your cat's upper lip. He'll lick it from there. Special foods can help too, as can regular brushing.

Keep in mind, though, that while speed eating and hairballs are common culprits, they're far from the only ones. So consult your veterinarian, and stay alert for red flags: blood, loss of appetite, lethargy or accompanying diarrhea (like humans, dehydration then is a concern).

Peterson tells the story of her adopted cat who kept gagging like he had one heck of a hairball. Turns out, he had asthma. I know I've been guilty of being too quick to just chalk things up to Bosley being Bosley. So I'm taking Peterson's advice and starting a log, just to make sure this isn't happening too frequently (and to also track the food he ate that day). I figure that whatever I find is worth mentioning at his next exam.

As for the ottoman, a standard enzymatic cleaning solution ultimately saved the day. And the wedding.



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