



Gastrointestinal Stasis

What is gastrointestinal (GI) stasis?

GI stasis is the slowing down, or complete stoppage, of food moving through the GI tract. It is most commonly seen in rabbits, but can also be seen in guinea pigs and chinchillas. This process can be caused by dehydration, stress, or underlying health problems that can cause anorexia. This slowing down of the GI tract can cause an imbalance of the bacterial content within the GI tract leading to potential toxin buildup, gas buildup, or intestinal blockage. GI stasis can be fatal if left untreated within the first 24 to 48 hours.

What are the symptoms of GI stasis?

General symptoms of stasis include lethargy and signs of pain. This can include, but is not limited to, teeth grinding and a hunched posture as well as flopping in an attempt to find a comfortable position. Typically animals in stasis are not eating or eating noticeably less. Some more subtle symptoms include not taking normal treats or changes in fecal output. As their owner, you know your pet best, so if you notice any symptoms of not acting normally it may warrant a vet visit.

How is GI stasis diagnosed?

Oftentimes GI stasis can be diagnosed by your veterinarian based on a physical exam. It is also important to assess the severity of stasis to best define treatment. This can include getting an accurate body temperature, blood work, or radiographs. The appropriate diagnostic plan should be discussed with your veterinarian.

How is GI stasis treated?

The treatment of GI stasis revolves around symptomatic care as well as any necessary treatments based on an underlying cause of the stasis. Some animals will recover in as little as 24 hours, while others may take several days to over a week to fully recover. There are several treatments that will often be required for supportive care for stasis. In mild cases outpatient therapy may be warranted while more severe cases can require aggressive in hospital therapy.

- **Fluid therapy** - in general GI stasis will cause some level of dehydration and electrolyte imbalances
- **Pain relief** - GI stasis is typically associated with severe abdominal pain and appropriate pain control is important for relief of symptoms
- **Hand/Syringe feeding** - Appropriate feeding is arguably the most important aspect of stasis treatment. Most animals with stasis will have a reduced appetite or no appetite at all. Often it will be required to feed a liquid diet via syringe in order to support and kick

start the GI tract. Oxbow Critical Care is the most commonly used product on the market.

- **GI motility drugs** - These drugs can be used to stimulate normal motility of the GI tract. They are not always indicated depending on symptoms or underlying problems, and so will be prescribed at the discretion of your veterinarian.

Can I prevent GI stasis?

Appropriate dietary management at home is the most effective way to help prevent GI stasis. It is important that fiber, specifically from a quality hay, make up a majority of the diet at home. This will help to ensure proper digestion and GI homeostasis through appropriate bacterial growth.

We typically recommend having a syringe feeding product on hand such as Oxbow Critical Care. If you notice mild symptoms of stasis beginning, you can attempt to syringe feed at home. In some animals this syringe feeding at home is all that is needed to help avoid a full blown stasis event. You can also try using simethicone (infant gas drops) to help alleviate gas buildup as well. However, if this does not appear to make your pet feel better they should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible given the severe nature of GI stasis.