



Be careful when it comes time to unwrap presents. Ribbon can be very enticing to the playful cat.

cat, are known as linear foreign bodies, according to Dr. Young.

No one really knows why cats eat unusual things. They may be bored or stressed or looking for attention. Some experts speculate that a cat deficient in a certain nutrient might be drawn to eat an object that might provide the nutrient. No one has proved any of these theories. "It's most likely that your cat is curious and, just like a toddler, likes to taste things," says Dr. Young. "String and ribbons may just taste good."

What happens to the body if a cat ingests string or other linear foreign bodies? "If long enough, the string may become tangled around the base of the tongue and the rest of the string may continue down the throat," says Dr. Young. "Then peristalsis (the wave-like muscular contractions that aid in digestion) can cause the string, which becomes taut, to actually saw through the intestines." This, of course, is a potentially life-threatening condition, often leading to intestinal leakage and peritonitis.

Sometimes you can't be sure that your cat has swallowed anything foreign. You may realize that the needle and thread you were working with are missing, or that your bathroom wastebasket — in which you throw away used dental floss — has been overturned.

The signs that may signal that your cat has swallowed a foreign body include: vomiting, diarrhea or constipation, a painful abdomen, lethargy, not eating or hiding. "Basically, these are the signs of a sick cat that requires immediate veterinary care," says Dr. Young.

Treatment For Swallowed Objects

What should you do if you see that your cat has swallowed a string-like object? Says Dr. Young, "Try pulling it out. But only very slowly and gently. If it does not come out easily, do not yank on it.

The Danger of String

A cat and a ball of yarn is an adorable picture, but the hazards aren't worth it. Same goes for holiday ribbon and tinsel.

Brooke Remy of Boston, MA, was delighted to watch her cat Puddles play with a long, pink ribbon she had just taken off a gift box. He twirled around and around and rolled over on the floor. Brooke tired before Puddles did, and left the room for about five minutes.

When she returned, the ribbon was gone — except for about two inches sticking out of Puddles's mouth. He was coughing and drooling. Running over to him, Brooke began slowly pulling the ribbon out of his mouth, watching in terror and amazement as she removed eight inches of wet pink ribbon from his throat.

Puddles was lucky that Brooke had returned in time. If he had swallowed the ribbon without Brooke's quick intervention, he could have suffered very

serious, even life-threatening, damage to his intestinal tract.

Why Cats Eat Strange Things

The tendency of some cats, dogs and even humans to consume odd, non-food objects is a condition called *pica*. "Swallowing ribbon, string and other objects is not uncommon in cats," says Joann Young, DVM, of The Cat Doctor in Dover, New Hampshire. "This is more likely to occur in younger cats, but I've seen older cats that swallow such things."

Besides eating ribbons and string, cats will go after any number of weird objects: yarn, fishing line, rubber bands, tinsel, Easter grass, needles and thread, window-blind pulls, feather cat toys, dental floss and even rubber tubing. String-like objects, when swallowed by a



Call your veterinarian or an emergency clinic immediately.”

Don't worry; your cat will not choke or suffocate on the way,” continues Dr. Young. “The string is not blocking the airway.”

In another scenario, you may first realize that your cat has swallowed a string when you see part of it sticking out of its anus. Again, try pulling very slowly and gently on the string. If it comes out, then your cat is probably okay, but scheduling a veterinary examination as quickly as possible is prudent. If you can only get part of it out, “cut off the section that is visible, and then observe your cat. See if your cat passes the rest of the string in her feces. But if she shows any sign of illness, seek treatment immediately.”

Your veterinarian will first do a complete examination, including looking under the tongue to see if anything is

wound around the base. If it is obvious that your cat has swallowed something, the veterinarian will try to remove it. Most likely, she will do an X-ray to locate the object or observe the intestinal gas pattern, which can indicate that an object has been swallowed.

Many cases do require surgery to remove the object. Sometimes the veterinarian has to cut away little sections of the intestine if the string has caused leakage. “Surgery is pretty successful — if we perform it early enough,” says Dr. Young.

Prevent Swallowing Accidents

It's a lot easier to keep your cat from swallowing an object than to remove one that's already gone down the hatch. Dr. Young offers these suggestions:

- ◆ Cover wastebaskets in your bathroom and kitchen. Dr. Young treated one cat that ate an elastic ponytail

holder along with a good length of dental floss.

- ◆ Keep sewing, knitting and other craft items in a drawer or room that your cat can't explore.

- ◆ Store fishing gear away securely. “One of the strangest objects I removed from a cat's intestinal tract was a three-prong fishing hook that he bit off a fishing line,” says Dr. Young.

- ◆ Don't use tinsel or string-like decorations on the Christmas tree.

- ◆ Cover trash cans outside. “I once treated a cat that jumped into a dumpster after Thanksgiving, and retrieved and ate the twine used to truss a turkey,” says Dr. Young.

- ◆ Supervise your cat when she plays with any string-like toys. Put them away when your cat is finished.

- ◆ Watch any cat that has already had a swallowing accident. Many are repeat offenders. ❖ By Ilene Springer

Call your veterinarian or a technician
to check your cat's teeth.
"I don't worry," you say, "my cat
is a good eater." But the fact is
that a cat's teeth are important
to his health. If they are
rotten, your cat may have
difficulty eating, and he may
lose weight. In some cases,
tooth decay can lead to
infection and even to the loss
of a tooth.

In another scenario, you may find
that your cat is pawing at his
mouth when you are petting him.
This could be a sign of tooth
decay. If you notice this, take
your cat to the veterinarian for
a dental checkup. The vet will
examine your cat's teeth and
may take X-rays to see if there
is any decay. If you catch
tooth decay early, your cat
may not need a root canal or
extraction. But if the decay
is advanced, your cat may
need a root canal or extraction.
Your veterinarian will discuss
the best treatment option for
your cat's teeth.

remains around the eye. This is often
due to a tear duct blockage.
The veterinarian will try to
flush the tear duct with a
sterile solution. If this
doesn't work, surgery may be
needed to correct the problem.

Another cause of eye problems in
cats is conjunctivitis, also
known as pink eye. This is
inflammation of the conjunctiva,
the thin, moist membrane that
lines the inner surface of the
eyelids. Conjunctivitis can be
caused by bacteria, viruses,
or allergies.

However, following a viral
infection, your cat may develop
keratitis, a more serious eye
condition. Keratitis is
inflammation of the cornea,
the clear, front part of the
eye. It can be caused by
bacteria, viruses, or trauma.
Keratitis can lead to blindness
if not treated promptly.

initially, a good diet is
essential.

• Feed your cat a diet
rich in protein and fat.
Cats are obligate carnivores,
which means they need
protein from animal sources
to stay healthy.

• Avoid feeding your cat
vegetables or grains.
Cats do not have the
enzymes needed to digest
these foods.

• Offer fresh water
at all times. Dehydration
can lead to kidney disease
and other health problems.

• Avoid feeding your cat
table scraps. These can
be high in fat and salt,
which can lead to obesity
and pancreatitis.

• If you are feeding your
cat a commercial diet,
make sure it is a high-quality
cat food.

• If you are feeding your
cat a home-cooked diet,
make sure it is balanced
and contains all the
essential nutrients.

(Cat Care continued from page 31)
use an exercise board, but angle the cat
in your lap while your watching TV
or relaxing, and do a couple of slow

each night. Or you can use a
catnip toy to help your cat
relax.

will find that your cat is
more comfortable. If your
cat is still uncomfortable,
consult your veterinarian.

• Sit down and struggle your cat in your lap or on a
table top. (The cat will have less tension if it is
supported.)

• Hold up a paw; grasp it gently and press it against
your body plate. (You should feel your cat's paw
pad and your thumb securely on top of it.)

• Squeeze your thumb and index finger against the
exterior of the claw.

• Using the clipper, cut about halfway to the
end of the claw and the quick — the pink, sensitive
part of the claw. If you cut too
far, the quick will bleed. There may be
some bleeding, but it will stop on its own.
The wound will soon heal.

Dr. William Miller recommends that a cat's eyes
be examined and trimmed every two weeks or so.
Although a veterinarian or professional groomer can
certainly do it, most owners are capable of
doing it themselves.

Following are some pointers on claw trimming pro-
cedure in a video on the subject produced by the
Cornell Feline Health Center and available on the
Internet at <http://www.cornell.edu/vet/med/education/feline>.

• Do the trimming when your cat is relaxed or
sleepy.
• Have all equipment that you'll need — such as
clippers, a styptic powder or pencil
— on hand before starting the procedure.