CAUSES OF DIARRHEA

* Small intestinal and large intestinal diarrhea have different causes, require different tests to diagnose and are treated differently.
* Small intestinal diseases result in a larger amount of stool passed with a mild increase in frequency; about 3 to 5 bowel movements per day. The pet doesn't strain or have difficulty passing stool. Animals with small intestinal disease may also vomit and lose weight. Excess gas production is sometimes seen and you may hear the rumbling of gas in the belly. If there is blood in the stool it is digested and black in color.
* Disease of the large intestine including the colon and rectum cause the pet to pass small amounts of loose stool very often, usually more than 5 times daily. The pet strains to pass stool. If there is blood in the stool, it is red in color. The stool may be slimy with mucus. The pet does not usually vomit or lose weight with large bowel diarrhea.
* A sudden onset of small intestinal diarrhea may be caused by **viruses including canine distemper, canine parvovirus, canine coronavirus, feline panleukopenia virus or feline coronavirus**, in young, poorly vaccinated pets.
* Small intestinal diarrhea can be caused by **bacteria such as salmonella, clostridia or campylobacter** although these same bacteria can be found in the stool of normal dogs and cats.
* **Worms and giardia** can cause small intestinal diarrhea, mostly in young animals.
* **Foreign bodies including bones, sticks** and other objects can pass through the stomach and get stuck in the intestine causing both diarrhea and vomiting.

These same foreign materials may pass through the intestinal tract without getting stuck but may damage the lining of the intestinal tract causing diarrhea.

* **Dietary indiscretion or a sudden change in diet** can cause diarrhea with or without vomiting.
* **Food allergies in dogs and cats** can cause diarrhea, vomiting or itchy skin.
* **Toxins including lead and insecticides** can cause diarrhea usually with vomiting.
* **Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)** occurs commonly in both dogs and cats. In IBD the walls of the intestine contain abnormal numbers of inflammatory cells which can be eosinophils, lymphocytes or plasma cells. The cause of IBD is not known but is suspected to be an allergic reaction to components of food, bacteria or parasites. IBD can be congenital in some breeds of dogs, for example Basenji dogs may develop a severe inflammatory bowel disease.
* **Tumors of the intestine** are another cause of diarrhea usually occurring in older pets. The tumor may be a single mass when the tumor is from the glands of the intestine (adenocarcinoma) and may be removed by surgery or the tumor may occur diffusely along the intestine. **Lymphosarcoma** occurs in both dogs and cats and can either be a single or multiple masses in the intestine or the abnormal lymphocytes may be spread through out the intestine. Lymphosarcoma is often responsive to anti-cancer drugs in cats but rarely responds to anti-cancer drugs in dogs.
* In certain parts of the world small intestinal disease can be caused by **fungal infections including histoplasmosis**.
* Diseases outside the intestinal tract that may cause diarrhea include **kidney failure, liver failure, pancreatic disease and hyperthyroidism in the cat**. Severe inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis) can lead to damage of the pancreas and an inability to make enough enzymes to digest fat. This is called pancreatic insufficiency and causes diarrhea with a large volume of greasy stool. Pancreatic insufficiency can occur in young animals due to a congenital deficiency of pancreatic enzymes.
* Diarrhea of large intestinal origin can be caused by **whipworms, polyps, inflammatory bowel disease, colonic ulcers or colonic cancer**.
* **Stress** can cause large bowel diarrhea in excitable dogs.