

I have been taking my cat to the same vet since he was a kitten. She's always done a great job but a few months ago he started vomiting all the time. My vet has done a lot of tests and tried different medications but nothing is helping. I think she's missing something. How do I go about getting a second opinion? I don't want to hurt her feelings.

Veterinary medicine is an enormous field and veterinarians can't specialize in everything. Imagine expecting your own doctor to know everything about complex digestive problems as well as eye problems, heart problems, dental problems, and skin problems, along with how to do basic surgery. All veterinarians have cases that can be puzzling and sometimes we get to a point in those cases where we've run out of ideas and our patient is not improving. If your veterinarian hasn't suggested it, there are 3 options at this point; having your doctor discuss the case with others at the practice, getting a second opinion or ask for a referral to a specialist.

Asking your veterinarian to discuss your cat's case with other doctors in their practice is a great place to start. Most multi-doctor practices have case rounds where the doctors discuss cases and get input from each other. Education, training and personal experience of individual doctors varies and new ideas are often discussed. Another doctor in the same practice may have experience with a similar pet and may be able to help.

You also have the right to request your pet's records and arrange a visit with another general practice at any time. This option may cause you to feel like you're starting back at the beginning, explaining the history and signs and possibly repeating some tests. Seeing another veterinarian in the area may be helpful but if your pet has a very complicated case, you may end up spending more money without additional answers. Some people feel that they are being disloyal to their regular veterinarian when they seek a second opinion.

The third option is to ask for a referral to a veterinary internal medicine specialist. These are vets who have completed 3 to 4 additional years of specialty training beyond the 4 years of veterinary school and have passed a rigorous set of qualifying exams. They often have more diagnostic tools enabling them to perform tests that your regular veterinarian cannot. These vets also have experience with very complicated cases and may have seen a cat with a problem similar to yours.

Be honest with your veterinarian about the lack of improvement and your concerns. Hopefully you will find that your veterinarian is understanding and comfortable with your seeking a second medical opinion.

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