

# Subtotal Colectomy

A colectomy is a procedure to remove all or part of the colon. Common conditions treated with a colectomy are megacolon in cats, intussusceptions, and colonic tumors. Megacolon occurs when the colon becomes hypomotile (low motility) which results in severe constipation.

**Causes:** Causes of megacolon include mechanical obstruction (pelvic fractures, strictures, masses), neurologic, endocrine (diabetes), or idiopathic (no known cause). The most common diagnosis is idiopathic. Most cats are middle aged to older with no sex predilection.



**Diagnosis:** Most cats present for multiple episodes of severe constipation. The cats are usually straining to defecate and can vomit due to the straining.

On palpation of the abdomen, the colon is distended with an excessive amount of feces. Radiographs of the abdomen confirm that the colon is enlarged and is impacted with feces. Radiographs can also be useful when determining the cause of the megacolon (old healed pelvic fractures).



Abdominal Xray  
showing an enlarged  
colon in a cat

**Treatment:** Most cats are initially treated by their family veterinarian with medications to control constipation (stool softeners, laxatives, enemas, and high fiber diets). If the constipation becomes more frequent and the cat's quality of life is diminishing, then surgical correction is highly recommended. Surgical treatment for megacolon is a subtotal colectomy. The majority of the colon is removed except for a very small portion to reconnect the intestine.

**Aftercare:** Most cats are sent home on pain medications and antibiotics. Your cat will need to be restricted in activity (no running, jumping, or playing) until the sutures are removed. If your cat begins vomiting, straining to defecate, has abdominal pain, or becomes lethargic after surgery, please seek immediate medical attention.

**Prognosis:** The prognosis for an improved quality of life after surgery for megacolon is good to excellent. Cats will initially have soft stools or diarrhea after surgery. The majority of cats will have normal formed stools within several weeks to months. The prognosis for other conditions needing a subtotal colectomy are based on the underlying medical condition. Complications of a subtotal colectomy include leakage, dehiscence, peritonitis, stricture, recurrent constipation, and persistent diarrhea.