

THE DIGESTIVE PROCESS

The activity that normally takes place within the feline gastrointestinal tract begins when a cat takes food into its mouth, chews it into small pieces with its teeth, and allows it to move to its pharynx, the hollow structure at the back of its mouth. From this holding area, the food is swallowed, passing into the esophagus — a slender tube that travels down through the animal's chest and opens into its stomach.

Within the stomach, a muscular, bag-shaped organ, the ingested food mixes with potent acids and enzymes that are produced by the stomach lining and then moves through a narrow sphincter (pylorus) into the first section of the small intestine (duodenum).

There the food mixes with bile, a potent alkaline liquid secreted by the liver, as well as a fluid that is produced by the pancreas. These substances and their enzymes play a key role in neutralizing the harsh stomach acids and breaking down proteins, fats, and carbohydrates so that they can be absorbed through the intestinal lining and into the cat's bloodstream.

From the small intestine, the food passes into the large intestine, which absorbs additional nutrients and also a substantial amount of the water remaining in the ingested food. In addition, a section of the large intestine — the colon — serves as a storage area for the solid waste that is left over following the digestive process. This material — the feces — is eventually evacuated from the colon via the rectum and anus.