

## **Cystitis and other Feline Bladder Problems**

### **What kind of bladder conditions do cats have and what are the symptoms?**

Cats can have a variety of urinary bladder problems including bladder infections, interstitial cystitis, urinary stones, urinary crystals, and rarely in cats, tumors. The most common feline bladder problem is interstitial cystitis which is a chronic, intermittent inflammation of the bladder often associated with stress. Infections are more common in female cats and older cats, and are often caused by bacteria from the colon such as *E.coli*. Crystals and stones can develop in either gender at any age and are related to food issues and poor water intake.

The inflammation in the bladder from any of these problems causes an increased sense of urgency to urinate, and therefore an increased frequency of trips to the litter box with smaller amounts of urine than usual each trip. You may see straining to urinate, vocalizations while urinating, and the production of pink, red or brownish urine, sometimes in drops or very small volumes. It's also common for these cats to urinate outside of the litter box because of discomfort in their bladder. Often, cats with bladder irritation will urinate so frequently that they keep their bladder nearly empty. They may lick under their tail compulsively, and sometimes they will scoot or drag their back end on the floor.

Any of these conditions can lead to the additional complication of a urethral obstruction, which causes an inability to pass urine out of the body. This very painful, life-threatening emergency is more likely in males due to their longer, narrower urethra but occasionally happens to female cats as well. Since it can be very hard to tell at home if a cat is blocked or just uncomfortable with cystitis, any cat exhibiting any of the symptoms of bladder disease should be examined as soon as possible. Palpation of the bladder by gentle, experienced hands is needed to tell if a cat is blocked, and if it is, an anesthetic and a urinary catheter will be needed as soon as possible.

### **How are bladder conditions diagnosed?**

The most important step is a urinalysis, which looks for white and red blood cells, protein, bacteria, and crystals, and can also diagnose diabetes and declining kidney function. A urine culture may be needed to identify the bacteria causing an infection and the antibiotics those bacteria are sensitive to. X-rays are used primarily to rule out bladder stones, and Ultrasound can be used to look for bladder tumors and stones. Blood work is used to look for underlying kidney disease, diabetes which can increase the risk of bladder infections, and high potassium and kidney damage after an obstruction.

### **How are bladder conditions treated?**

Treatment depends on the particular condition, and any underlying disease. Antibiotics are used for infections, ideally based on culture and sensitivity testing. Bladder stones are removed surgically, unless they are very tiny, and recurrence - as for crystals - is prevented by diet changes and increasing water intake. Urinary obstructions require anesthesia and catheterization. Treatment of interstitial cystitis involves medications to relieve pain, reduce anxiety, and to protect the bladder lining. Most bladder problems will benefit from increased water intake, and one of the most effective methods is reducing dry food and giving more canned food, especially with extra water stirred in. Each cat is unique in the way they prefer water presented, and identifying the optimal presentation for each individual is important - some prefer running water, some a big bowl, some a mug, and sometimes added flavoring can help.

**What follow up is needed?**

A follow up urine sample is usually performed, once at least and sometimes repeatedly, to make sure that treatment is effective. Some conditions may require long term treatments and permanent diet changes. Depending on the specifics of the case, we may also recommend follow up x-rays, blood work, or culture. We rely on you as owners to monitor symptoms at home and let us know if things aren't improving.