

K.C. CAT CLINIC
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FELINE LOWER URINARY TRACT DISORDERS

When a cat strains to urinate, has blood in its urine, or stays in its litter pan without producing much urine, it is telling you that it hurts to urinate. It is usually because of irritation in the bladder. Cystitis is a word that means irritation in the bladder, but it doesn't tell you why. Some cats won't show any other signs except urinating outside the litter pan. Sometimes cats will have an actual bacterial infection like what commonly occurs in people. If the cat is younger than 8 years old when the signs first occur, then we are very suspicious of a unique inflammatory disease of the bladder of cats that we call Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC). Sometimes cats will have other problems in their urinary tracts that don't fall into either one of these categories. If we can, we like to get a urine sample to look for clues as to what kind of problem is occurring. We may need to do blood tests or take X-rays. Different kinds of problems are treated in different ways, so it is important that we try to find out what is at the root of the problem.

The most common problem in young cats is FIC. The bladder wall is inflamed in this disorder and the physical characteristics of the urine (like pH and mineral content) predispose to the development of a type of crystal called a struvite crystal. In female cats, the urethra, or the tube that takes urine out of the body, is large enough to pass most of the crystals and debris that accumulates. In male cats, however, the urethra is very narrow and debris from the bladder can actually get caught in the tiny tube and result in a blockage. If that happens, the cat can't urinate and can quickly go into a life-threatening situation.

There are several things that predispose a cat to this disorder. A cat can have a genetic predisposition to the problem. Stress is another factor. Stress can be something that is easily recognized, like a move, a new baby, and new people or pets coming into or leaving the household. Our clinic tends to see more cases in the spring and fall when we have crazy weather patterns, so perhaps barometric changes or other environmental stresses are at work. Another common reason for stress is tension in households where the cats don't get along. Diet can also be a factor. We see problems in cats eating certain kinds of food. The fifth factor is the presence of some underlying physical entity. One current theory is that these cats are experiencing a form of interstitial cystitis similar to what some people unfortunately have. We don't know all the answers about this problem just as they don't have all the answers for people, but we do have ways to try to manage it.

Our treatment goals are twofold. First we want to make the cat feel better. The medications administered at the time that you bring your cat in are hopefully going to bring about rapid relief. If your cat does not respond as expected, we will want to do other tests or treatments to find out why not. Our second goal is to try to decrease the likelihood that the problem will reoccur. We will make diet recommendations that will be important for you to follow. Cats that have been diagnosed with a struvite crystal problem should eat SO, UR or C/D as their maintenance diets. Addressing stress in the household is a big part of prevention. Please read the materials in the cat area at The Indoor Pet Initiative web site, <http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/>

Sometimes struvite or other crystals don't stay small enough to pass and stick to each other. A stone can be formed inside the bladder and that is one of the things we will want to check for if your cat doesn't respond to its initial therapy as expected. Different treatments and diets are called for with different types of stones.