

ORAH Info:

What is FLUTD (Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease)?



The lower urinary tract includes the bladder and the urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body). Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD) refers to several conditions affecting this area that range from mild to severe.

SYMPTOMS

Cats with FLUTD may exhibit some or all of the following signs:

- frequent attempts to urinate, producing small amounts
- straining to urinate
- urinating outside the litter box, in inappropriate places
- crying out while trying to urinate
- blood-tinged urine

A cat with FLUTD may be straining because of inflammation and pain in the urinary tract, or because the urethra is obstructed and the cat is unable to pass urine. **Urinary obstruction, or "blockage," occurs mostly in male cats and can be life-threatening, so any male cat displaying any of these behaviors should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.**

WHAT CAUSES FLUTD?

There is no clear answer to this question, because there are many contributing factors. Often, especially in younger cats, no specific cause can be determined, and this is called "idiopathic" disease. Bacterial infection (especially in older cats), bladder stones, and (rarely) cancer are other possibilities.

HOW DO WE APPROACH DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT?

If the cat is not blocked and is still eating and drinking, a urinalysis may be done to look for crystals or bacteria in the urine. An x-ray may be taken to look for bladder stones. Treatment will depend on what evidence is (or is not) found, and may include pain medications, urethral relaxants, fluids, prescription diets, or antibiotics. Surgery may be necessary to remove large bladder stones.

If the cat is blocked, hospitalization and more intensive care is needed to relieve the urinary obstruction and to reduce the chance of recurrence.

MORE ABOUT IDIOPATHIC FLUTD

Idiopathic urinary tract disease is very common in cats. There is inflammation of the bladder and the cat feels a sensation of pain and urgency and may even have blood in the urine. This is not caused by bacterial infection. Risk factors that contribute to episodes include inadequate water intake, obesity, stress at home (such things as owners moving or going on vacation, conflict with other animals in the house, holidays, or other changes in routine or surroundings), unclean or "unacceptable" litter boxes (leading to the cat holding urine for longer), and crystals in the urine.

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HOW CAN WE HELP REDUCE THE FREQUENCY OF EPISODES?

Increase water intake:

- feed canned food, or add liquid to food
- water source - cats have preferences for size, color, depth, and material of their bowls
- experiment with different bowls to find your cat's favorite
- some cats prefer moving water, like a dripping tap
- kitty water fountains are inexpensive and can be found at pet stores

Reduce stress:

- be aware of changes in the house or routine that may be stressful to your cat
- feline pheromones that have a soothing effect are available
- some cats benefit from anti-anxiety medications
- cats are solitary creatures and need a place to get away from other pets and family members
- enrich your cat's life - cats need places to scratch, stretch, play, and climb

Improve the litter box experience:

- litter boxes are like port-o-potties, no one likes to use a dirty one! Clean them once a day or more
- there should be at least one litter box for each cat in the household
- boxes should not be tucked away in places the cat hates to go (basement, garage)
- cats can have very specific preferences for box size, depth, cover or no cover
- they can also have litter preferences: scented, clumping, clay, shavings, paper
- experiment with multiple boxes and litter types and see which your cat prefers to use!

Reduce crystals:

- crystals form from minerals in the urine that develop when the urine is too acid or alkaline
- these crystals may irritate the bladder and are often part of the plugs that cause urinary obstructions in male cats
- crystals are also found in cats without any signs of discomfort, so their role is not clear
- the general consensus, though, is that reducing the formation of crystals through dietary management is beneficial and may reduce the frequency of episodes. If your cat has had crystals, he may be placed on a special prescription diet, usually for life.