

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease FLUTD

What symptoms may my cat show?

- Typically squatting to urinate very frequently
- Urinating in odd places
- Blood seen in urine or at the end of a urination
- Sometimes straining to urinate with nothing coming out
- Crying/yowling with pain
- Excessive licking at the genitalia(especially male neuters)

Surprisingly ,in contrast to cystitis in humans,it has been shown the vast majority of cats with cystitis or FLUTD do not have a bacterial infection.

The exception to this rule is older cats, especially older female cats .This is because old cats may have more dilute urine making it easier for bugs to grow.

FLUTD is a relatively common presentation and most cases will be treated on a symptomatic basis at first. The consulting vet may request a urine sample to measure the specific gravity, check for acidity, and dip stick for blood etc.Advice is often given try to calm the cat,to take their mind off wanting to wee.Sometimes we advise to temporarily place the cat in a travel basket as this acts as a displacement distraction and stops the cycle of straining on a litter tray.Beware however of the **BLOCKED** cat(see later notes).

If the symptoms are recurrent,or if the cat is older than 6 years ,or if the symptoms are very severe then further investigations are warranted.These may include ultrasonography,xray studies,blood samples,and urinalysis including urine culture in selected cases.

These further investigations are to identify conditions that may mimic FLUTD ,for example bladder stones,bladder polyps, and rarely bladder wall tumours.

Is there any thing I can do to prevent FLUTD in my cat?

Recognised factors predisposing to FLUTD include:

- Obesity.
- Not drinking enough.
- Inactivity.
- Stress (for example having the builders in!).
- Dried food diets with inadequate access to water.

In trying to prevent FLUTD attention should be directed to the above risk factors.

What are struvite crystals and why is my vet looking for them?

A proportion of cats pass a crystal in there urine. There are different types of crystals that precipitate at different acidities. Normal urine should have an acidity of around 6.00 to 6.50. Often cats with FLUTD have urine acidity above 7.00. Struvite crystals are formed and precipitate in urine acidities above 7.00. Struvite crystals can be found in cats without FLUTD but in cats with FLUTD they can contribute to blockages in the urethra called urethral plugs. It is generally agreed that if a cat is showing struvite and alkali urine best practice is to try and reverse this situation by changing the acidity of the urine. Special foods have been formulated to do this .

How will I manage my cat with FLUTD?

FLUTD often waxes and wanes in severity, often with many months without any signs. During a bout of FLUTD which may typically last 3 to 5 days treatment is designed to give pain relief, address predisposing factors, and monitor for improvement of symptoms. Male cats in particular must be monitored to make sure they have not become blocked.

Management may divided into longterm and short term in a flare up of symptoms.

Longterm management strategies for FLUTD

- Increase water intake
 - Use wet foods
 - Multiple drink points
 - Try different types of water e.g. rain water
 - Add extra water to the food.
- Dietary management
 - For cats with urine pH greater than 6.5
 - Aim is to acidify the urine with special foods.
- Stress reducers
 - Reduce stress flare factors e.g. strangers
 - Provide more water bowls and dishes to eat
 - Pheromones have been shown to help(Feliway)
- Encourage exercise
 - Increase activity by games/ball chasing etc.

Sadly despite the best attempts at management FLUTD proves to be a recurrent condition in the cat and often a patient that has once experienced it will go on to have a recurrence at some point in their lives.

The blocked cat

Finally we need to talk about the blocked cat.

Invariably these cats go through a phase of severe pain ,but may present to us in the later stage of this condition in a collapsed extreme state.

Usually this would be a male neuter cat,often will have had previous bouts of FLUTD but not always.This is an emergency as if the urethra becomes blocked and the cat cannot urinated the urine will back up on the kidneys and the kidneys can be forced to shut down.Untreated a blockage exceeding 24 to 48 hours may result in death.The only sure way to differentiate a blocked cat from one just straining on an empty bladder is to palpate the bladder to assess its fullness.

If there is any doubt whether a male cat is blocked it should be taken to the vets for evaluation.

A blocked cat is usually admitted to the clinic to have the blockage cleared under anaesthetic . After stabilisation with intravenous fluids,a urinary catheter is used to flush out the blockage from the urethra.Sadly some cats cannot be unblocked and these cats are candidates for surgery.

Perineal urethrostomy

On some occasions the blockage cannot be shifted and these cats may have to consider surgical intervention(perineal urethrostomy).This procedure is very expensive and carries a high risk of post operative complications. It is only usually recommended as a last resort.

