

FELINE LOWER URINARY TRACT DISEASE

(Sometimes known as feline urological syndrome)

Introduction

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD) is sometimes still referred to as 'feline urological syndrome' or FUS. FLUTD usually affects the cat's lower urinary system, i.e. the bladder, sometimes the urethra (the tube-like structures that lead from the bladder to the outside of the body) and the kidneys.

What is FLUTD?

The term 'FLUTD' broadly covers a number of types of problem of the lower urinary tract in cats. It is a common condition seen by vets

The Condition in Cats

FLUTD can develop into a serious disease and if left untreated, can result in kidney failure, high blood pressure and death. Signs of FLUTD include:

- Prolonged or frequent squatting or straining to pass urine in or out of the litter box (some owners may confuse this with signs of constipation) and not producing urine. The cat can also produce only a small amount at a time and it may be tinged with blood
- Frequent production of normal looking urine
- Pain while urinating (meowing or howling)
- Going to the toilet outside the litter box, such as in corners, in flower pots or on human bedding
- Blood in the urine
- Frequent licking of the of the penis in males or the vulva in females
- Urine odours around the cat
- Lethargy, hiding away, a bad temper
- Vomiting
- Depression
- Collapse, coma and death

Some cats with FLUTD develop mucus lumps or gritty deposits in their urine. In the male cat, these deposits can block the urethra preventing the cat going to the toilet even though the bladder continues to fill.

Causes of the Condition in Cats

The condition can occur in both males and females, although males can have more complications due to their anatomy. Factors that may act as hazards and risks for the development of FLUTD include some or all of:

- Not drinking enough water. If the urine is too strong there are increased chances of blockages, especially when the cat is fed only on a low moisture diet
- A diet high in magnesium and perhaps some other minerals
- Too much acidity or alkalinity of the urine from too acidic or insufficiently acidic diet. Always feed a complete pet food suitable for your cat and not human food.
- Stress
- Insufficient exercise
- Obesity

Other factors that can contribute to this condition include:

- Viral or rarely bacterial infections
- Trauma, such as a broken pelvis
- Bladder stones
- Tumours of the urinary tract
- Congenital abnormalities that the cat was born with.

In many cases the cause is never discovered. Neutering, although the condition is common in the neutered male cat, is not thought to be a factor in the cause.

Diagnosis

A vet will perform a physical examination on the cat. The vet may find that the bladder is either small with a thick wall or very large, distended and painful. If the cat is able to go to the toilet, owners can collect a urine sample from the litter tray using a form of plastic cat litter that won't soak up the urine. If the cat can't urinate, the vet may have to get a urine sample using a procedure called 'cystocentesis', where a fine needle is inserted into the bladder from the outside. This is usually non-painful and in fact the cat often quickly feels better because the pressure on the bladder is relieved.

The vet may perform a 'urinalysis' or laboratory analysis of the urine sample that will indicate if there are crystals, bacteria, red or white blood cells in the urine. The vet will also measure the acidity of the urine and how concentrated the urine is. The vet may also take x-rays to look for bladder stones, a thickened bladder wall and rarely tumours or congenital abnormalities. The vet may have to use special x-ray techniques that involve injecting special dyes into the bladder to show up any abnormalities.

The vet may also test the cat's blood as cats with a blocked bladder 'often have serious problems associated with the 'backup' of urine in the blood stream. The most acute condition is kidney failure that may require fluids and the cat may not recover.

Treatment in Cats

If there are crystals or stones in the urine, the type is determined by analysis or identification under the microscope. Depending on the type of crystal, the vet may advise changing the cat's diet to alter the acidity or alkalinity of the urine to try and dissolve the crystals. This may involve special diets designed specifically for such conditions. They are often continued for the life of the cat to prevent recurrence of what is a very serious and potentially life-threatening condition. Fluids are generally given to the cat intravenously or sometimes under the skin. Fluids reduce dehydration, improve kidney function, by helping to dilute the urine and flush any deposits out of the bladder. Cats must be

encouraged to drink more fluids, either in the form of water – still mineral water may be better – or through feeding food that contains over 80% water.

The vet will prescribe antibiotics if a bacterial infection was involved.

If the cat has a blocked bladder, the vet will insert a small catheter into the bladder's opening under an anaesthetic to remove the obstruction. The vet will then flush the bladder with saline (salt solution), or a special dissolving solution.

The cat may then stay at the vet's, perhaps with the urinary catheter in place, for 24 hours or more to make sure that there are no more blockages.

Treatment varies from patient to patient but the cat is generally kept on pain killers, fluids and antibiotics.

Prevention in Cats

Keeping a cat active and in good health goes a long way to preventing this problem. Owners should ensure the cat has easy access to their litter tray and to fresh water at all times. The most important thing to do is to ensure that the cat is drinking plenty of fluids – there are milk substitutes sold specifically for cats.

Sometimes, when stress is involved the vet may prescribe sedatives or anti-depressants. The vet may also recommend changes in the way the cat is housed and its relationships with the owner and other animals in the household.

The cat may also need to be kept on a special diet for the rest of its life.

Conclusion

If the condition is diagnosed early, most cats can be treated successfully, which is why it important to know your cat and take it to see your vet if there

are any changes in its behaviour. Remember that this is a very serious disease and that owners should follow their vet's advice. Be very watchful if the cat has had the condition previously and don't delay in seeking help: it is an emergency.

Pets are Good for People

Pets provide us with loyalty, companionship, love and affection, as well as the many physical and psychological benefits. The least we can do to repay this is to ensure that we keep them in the best of health. A healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet can help us enjoy a much fuller and more rewarding life.

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For further information, please contact the Pet Health Council on:

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