

## **A Wee Problem**

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) describes a collection of conditions that can affect the bladder and urethra of cats. This syndrome can have many possible causes, but cats generally exhibit similar, recognizable signs. Cats with FLUTD usually show signs of difficulty and pain when urinating, increased frequency of urination, and blood in the urine. Affected cats tend to lick their genital area excessively, and sometimes they will urinate outside the litter box, often preferring cool, smooth surfaces like a tile floor or a bathtub.

While the condition can be seen in cats of any age, it is most frequently seen in middle-aged, over-weight cats that get little exercise, use an indoor litter box, have restricted access outside, and eat a dry diet. We also tend to see most of these cases during the spring months, so this time of year is the greatest risk period. Environmental factors, such as interactions with owners, multi-cat households, and changes in routine may also increase the risk that a cat will develop FLUTD.

Although cats with lower urinary tract disease behave in similar ways, the potential causes are multiple. Urinary tract infections, urinary stones, urethral plugs, cancer, and other disorders can affect the lower urinary tract of the cat. Because FLUTD can have many causes, it can be difficult to diagnose. Based on your cat's signs, your veterinarian will likely perform an initial physical examination and run a urinalysis. If the cause of the cat's signs has not been identified with urinalysis, other testing may be recommended, including bloodwork, x-rays, and urine culture.

### **Feline Idiopathic Cystitis**

Feline idiopathic cystitis is the most common diagnosis in cats with lower urinary tract signs. Cats suffering from FIC make frequent attempts to urinate, probably as a result of bladder discomfort, and often are found to have blood in their urine.

Stress seems to be an important factor in the development of FIC in cats. Possible sources of stress in a cat's life may include environmental changes, changes in food schedule, and changes in the number of animals in the household.

Environmental enrichment and modification can reduce stress and decrease the severity and frequency of FIC episodes. To reduce environmental stress, cats should be provided a safe, clean area in which to urinate, as well as opportunities to express natural predatory behaviour. These opportunities may include climbing posts and toys that can be chased and caught.

Because changes in food can also result in recurrence of FIC in some cats, the cat's diet should remain consistent in both content and schedule. There are also special diets available for "urinary health."

The most serious consequence of FLUTD is where a "plug" forms in the urethra, stopping urine flow out of the bladder. These "obstructed" cats should be treated as an emergency, and need to receive immediate veterinary care to relieve the obstruction.

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## **What Can I Do?**

1. Feed small meals on a frequent basis.
2. Provide clean, fresh water at all times.
3. Provide an adequate number of litter boxes (usually one more than the number of cats in the household).
4. Keep litter boxes in quiet, safe areas of the house.
5. Keep litter boxes clean.
6. Minimize major changes in routine.

## **Signs to Look For**

1. Straining to urinate.
2. Frequent and/or prolonged attempts to urinate.
3. Crying out while urinating.
4. Excessive licking of the genital area.
5. Urinating outside the litter box.
6. Blood in the urine.