**Urethral Obstruction in Cats**

Urethral obstruction is a problem that occurs almost exclusively in male cats. This is because the urethra of a male cat is much longer and narrower than that of a female cat, and so is more susceptible to becoming blocked. Urethral blockage is not a common condition, but when it occurs it is painful and life threatening. The cat will be unable to urinate despite repeated efforts, and acute kidney failure and death can occur within one or two days if not treated appropriately. A cat with urethral obstruction will usually show repeated attempts to urinate that are unproductive, crying when straining and increased agitation.

Depending on the underlying cause, you may have also noticed some other changes in your cat’s urinating behaviour over the preceding few days such as increased frequency of urination, straining, discomfort or even some blood in the urine. If you think your cat has an obstructed urethra, contact your vet immediately as this is an emergency.

There are several underlying conditions which can cause obstruction of the narrow urethra of a male cat, including a ‘plug’ in the urethra (an accumulation of proteins, cells, crystals and debris), a small stone (called a urolith) or swelling and spasm of the urethra.

Your vet will relieve the obstruction by sedating the cat and usually passing a catheter to flush out the obstruction. The vet will also want to perform some tests to assess kidney function and the underlying cause of the blockage. Further treatment depends on the cause of the obstruction and any complications that have arisen. Any damage to the kidneys will require intravenous fluids and most cats will require pain relief and anti-inflammatories.

Long term management is aimed at the underlying cause. Cases associated with uroliths (stones in the urethra and bladder) will need to be managed with special diets. Most cats with urethral spasm or urethral plugs are thought to have cystitis and they should be managed as such, but where there are urethral plugs, diets to minimise crystals in the urine may also be helpful.

If you’ve noticed any abnormalities with your cat’s urination make sure to book an appointment with your vet and prevent a blockage before it occurs.