



Chronic Bladder Disease is one of the worst disorders afflicting cats!

Frequent attempts to urinate, straining, howling while in the litter box, blood in the urine and “accidents” outside the box – all are signs of bladder disease in cats. Examining the urine and taking an x-ray may reveal the problem in some cases but if the signs come back again and again despite treatment, your cat most likely has severe chronic bladder disease (cystitis).

Unlike in humans, cystitis in cats is rarely caused by an infection. In most cases, nearly 2 out of 3, we don't know the cause of its symptoms or how to treat them effectively.

For many cats, these ideas may help:

1. Provide your cat its OWN food and water bowl, litter box and resting area in a quiet part of the house where it will feel safe.
2. Provide a steady and predictable routine for your cat, including providing the same food (canned is better than dry) and litter (unscented clumping is the best) all the time.
3. Follow your veterinarian's advice about litter boxes. For example, daily or even twice daily cleaning can help, and providing more than one litter box often helps your cat.
4. Take time to help your cat feel less stressed. Groom or play with your cat for at least 20 minutes each day, and let it observe the outside of the house from a window perch.
5. In some cases drug treatment can speed the recovery process; pain relievers (never use Tylenol or aspirin in cats!) and prescription food are used more frequently than antibiotics.

What is the problem?

Based on studies done at veterinary colleges, cats with severe and recurrent cystitis seem to have a problem in their nervous system that causes them to have these signs. Researchers do not yet understand the cause, whether they were “born this way” or developed the problem later, but these cats are abnormally sensitive to their surroundings. These cats seem to find little things that don't bother healthy cats very threatening, which cause their bladder to react. Complicating matters even further, some cats are found to also have a metabolic complication causing urinary overload of certain minerals which can lead to crystal and/or stones in the bladder. See the back of this sheet for more information on the diagnostic process involved with this disease.

More information can be found in the following sources:

From the Cat's Point of View by G. Bohnenkamp

Cats for Dummies by G. Spadafori

The Diagnostic Process in Feline Cystitis

CYSTITIS, also known as “Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease,” is the term describing the following groups of symptoms:

- Bloody urine
- Straining to urinate (can easily be mistaken for straining to defecate)
- Urinating in unusual places
- Urinary blockage (almost exclusively a male cat problem)
- Licking the urinary opening (usually due to pain)

Central to treating a cat with CYSTITIS is determining which of many possible causes is present. It turns out that different diseases are common in different age groups of cats with this syndrome.

The average age of a cat with CYSTITIS is 4 years. Of all cats with CYSTITIS:

- 50% will not have a cause which can be determined despite extensive testing
- 20% will have bladder stones
- 20% will have a urethral blockage
- 1-5% will have a urinary tract cancer
- 1-5% will have had trauma to the urinary tract (i.e., have been hit by a car, etc.)
- 1-5% will have a combination of a bladder stone and an infection
- 1-3% will have a true infection

If one looks only at cats over age 10, the likely possibilities are completely different. In this older group:

- 50% will have true urinary tract infections
- 10% will have bladder stones
- 17% will have a combination of infection and bladder stones
- 7% will have urethral blockage
- 3% will have urinary tract cancer
- 5% will not have a cause that can be determined despite extensive testing

Further:

- 66% will be in some stage of kidney failure
- 5% will have urinary incontinence

In younger cats, there is a 50% chance that testing will be fruitless. Given this, testing beyond an examination and urinalysis may not be performed unless the syndrome is recurrent.

In older cats, it is more important to look for a diagnosis. A blood panel, urinalysis and urine culture will detect 50% of cats who have urinary tract infections and the 66% that are in kidney failure. Radiographs will pick up any bladder stones.

Unfortunately, some cats have such severe disease that there is little to be done for them once other causes have been eliminated from consideration. If your cat does not respond to repeated treatment or if you feel your cat is reaching an end point, please consult with us for further options.