# Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Could your cat be blocked?

Has your cat ever urinated outside the litter box, or frequented the box often without emptying his bladder? He may be trying to tell you something. He may even be trying to alert you to a life threatening condition.

Some cats with urinary tract disease may develop crystals in their urine. These crystals can irritate the lining of the bladder causing what is called cystitis, or they may accumulate into plugs and stones that can block the passage of urine through the narrow urethra. Cats suffering from these conditions will show signs of discomfort ranging from meowing during urination to straining to urinate with frequent grooming of the genital area. Cat owners often mistake these signs for constipation and miss an opportunity to seek medical treatment for their pet.

If you notice that your cat has increased frequency in urination, straining, or has blood in the urine, please seek medical attention as he may be developing a urinary tract obstruction. Unsuccessful attempts to urinate, lethargy and vomiting, are indications that a urinary blockage has developed. It is a life threatening emergency for your pet, and requires the attention of your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Your pet's doctor will determine whether the urethra is obstructed by palpating the bladder. If this is the case, the patient will be sedated and an indwelling urinary catheter will be placed to relieve bladder distention and allow urine to pass into a collection container for 24 to 48 hours. An IV catheter will be placed and your cat will be given intravenous fluids to rehydrate and correct electrolyte imbalances. The length of hospitalization will depend on how well he responds to treatment. Blood-work will be monitored to assess his kidney function. Once the urinary catheter is removed, it is imperative that the cat can pass urine on his own. Rarely, damage to the urethra is irreversible and a surgical procedure is necessary to dilate the opening.

Male cats are more frequently represented with urinary obstructions due to the narrow urethral opening. The urethra is the tube which urine passes through from the bladder to the outside. Other factors that may contribute to this disease include genetic factors, urinary tract infections, changes in the weather, dry food diets that are high in mineral content, lack of fresh drinking water, stress, and poor litter box management.

While we cannot do much about our cat's genetic background or the weather, cat owners can make positive changes in their pet's environment to help reduce the potential for developing a serious, potentially life threatening condition.

Always provide your pet with a clean litter box. If you have several cats, they may prefer to have separate boxes. Try different types of litter to find the type your pet prefers. Place the litter box in a private, quiet area.

You control your pet's diet. Offer a canned meat diet that is low in magnesium and other crystal forming minerals. Offer fresh water either in a bowl, waterfall or even a dripping faucet to encourage your cat to drink more often which helps to dilute the urine and keep the crystals dissolved.

Contact your veterinarian for more information on your pet's urinary tract health.