

Cystitis in Cats

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BASIC INFORMATION

Description

Bladder inflammation (cystitis) is common in young adult to middle-aged cats. The term *feline lower urinary tract disease* (FLUTD) refers to any condition that causes inflammation of the bladder of cats. It is not a specific disease. When cats show signs of bladder disease, testing is necessary to determine the underlying cause, so that specific therapy, if available, can be started.

Causes

Bladder stones account for about 15% of cystitis cases in cats. Bladder infections are not common in cats and account for fewer than 2% of cystitis cases. Structural abnormalities, such as bladder cancer, inflammatory polyps, and ectopic ureters, account for fewer than 10% of the cases. Behavioral problems also account for fewer than 10%.

In more than half of cats with signs of cystitis, no underlying cause can be found. If appropriate tests to exclude all other causes of cystitis are performed and are found to be negative, the term *feline idiopathic cystitis* (cystitis of unknown cause) is used.

Clinical Signs

Common signs of cystitis in cats include difficulty urinating or straining to urinate, pain on urination, urinating small volumes frequently, frequent trips to the litter box, urinating outside the litter box, and blood in the urine. Cystitis can progress to obstruction of urine outflow in male cats. (See also the handout on **Urethral Obstruction in Cats**.)

Diagnostic Tests

Urinalysis may show blood in the urine, white blood cells, or crystals. The presence of crystals may be normal in cats without signs of bladder disease. Crystals can be seen only under the microscope, and their presence does not mean that stones are present. Urine culture may be performed, although infections are rare.

Laboratory tests may also be recommended to rule out kidney disease and other medical conditions. X-rays of the abdomen are used to search for bladder stones. If the stones are too small or do not contain calcium, they will not be seen on x-rays. In these cases, an abdominal ultrasound may be needed.

Additional diagnostic tests may include contrast cystography to evaluate the thickness of the bladder and cystoscopy to look for any irregularities in the lining of the bladder. Positive contrast cystography involves taking x-rays after injecting a dye (that shows up white on x-rays) into the bladder through a urinary catheter.

With double-contrast cystography, air may be instilled first, followed by the dye. Cystoscopy involves passing a tiny, fiberoptic viewing scope into the bladder with the animal under anesthesia. This latter procedure is not widely available, however.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

If a cause is found, such as stones or infection, it is treated. Since infection is rarely the cause of cystitis in cats, antibiotics are not often needed. If an underlying reason is not apparent (the majority of cases), certain general treatments can be tried. Diluting the urine by feeding food with higher water content (canned or moist foods) can be tried. Access to fresh water is important, and water fountains may encourage cats to drink more.

Enriching the cat's environment also helps decrease the frequency and severity of signs. Providing toys and active play-time can help. Windows that allow outside viewing and increased time for interactions with owners may also be helpful. The litter box should be cleaned fastidiously (scooped daily and changed weekly). Provide one litter box for each cat in the household, plus one extra box. Avoid covered litter boxes and scented litter. Different cats have different preferences for the type of litter, so experimentation may be needed. More information and advice can be found at www.indoorcatinitiative.com.

Medications are often used as a last resort. Pain medications and certain sedatives or relaxants may be helpful. Amitriptyline (*Elavil*) is a tricyclic antidepressant that helps relax the bladder and may be useful for long-term treatment. It does not help in the short term. Feline pheromone spray (*Feliway*) may help some cats. Anti-inflammatory medications may be tried in some cats.

Follow-up Care

Because stress plays a role in idiopathic cystitis, frequent recheck visits to the veterinary hospital are sometimes counterproductive. Preventive measures, such as environmental enrichment, are important.

Prognosis

Most episodes of idiopathic cystitis resolve in 4-7 days, regardless of treatment. About half of affected cats have a recurrence of signs, which may be exacerbated by stress. The frequency, severity, and duration of signs seem to decrease as the cat gets older.