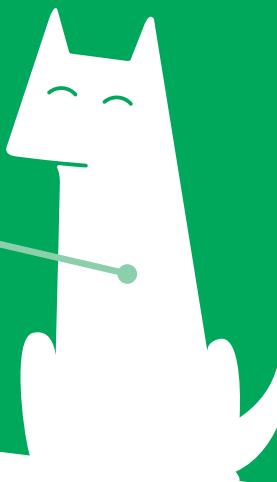


Feline asthma



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDE 13



Feline asthma is a term used to describe a number of conditions generally affecting the airways in the lungs. It is also known as feline chronic small airway disease, feline bronchitis and allergic airway disease. It occurs when the smooth muscle in the airways contracts, leading to increased production of mucus and inflammation of the airway tissue. As a result, the airways become narrowed and the cat develops difficulty with breathing. It can affect cats of all types and ages but Siamese cats tend to be more commonly affected.

What causes feline asthma?

The exact cause of feline asthma is not completely understood. In some cases it may be an allergic response to an irritant but in others no allergic cause can be found. Possible irritants include pollens, dust, cigarette smoke and some household sprays.

What are the signs?

The signs can vary and include:

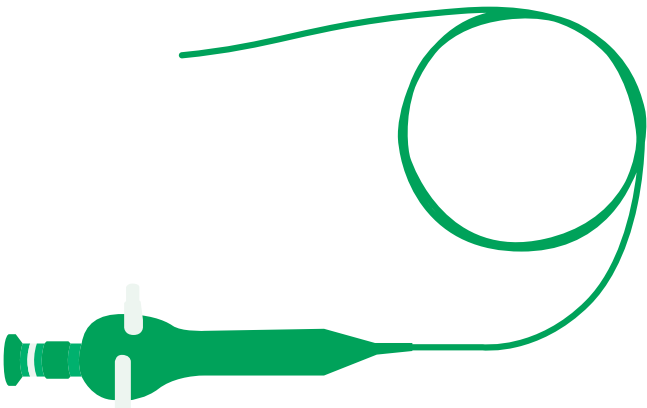
- an ongoing cough
- wheezing
- laboured breathing or respiratory distress occurring suddenly and without warning
- increased rate and effort of breathing

Signs can be mild and ongoing and may not be noticed by owners for some time – they often come and go.

How is it diagnosed?

Other conditions which may cause similar signs – such as bacterial infections, lungworm or heart disease – should be ruled out before making a diagnosis of asthma. If these are ruled out, further examination will be required. As part of the examination your cat may need to be sedated or anaesthetised. This will allow your vet to take x-rays to look for changes in the airways.

Not all cats show changes so your vet may also suggest passing a tiny camera – called a bronchoscope – down your cat's windpipe and/or collecting a fluid sample from the airways. These techniques allow your vet to inspect the airways and retrieve fluid to examine under the microscope. This provides useful information on the type and number of inflammatory cells present, which will indicate whether asthma is a likely diagnosis. The fluid collected can also be cultured for bacteria to identify any possible infection.



How is it treated?

Most cats diagnosed with asthma will require treatment to control their coughing and wheezing and prevent permanent, harmful changes occurring within their lungs. If you are aware of an irritant that triggers your cat's asthma, this should be avoided or attempts made to reduce your cat's exposure to it. For example, if pollen triggers the asthma, outside access could be limited while pollen levels are at their height. Avoid subjecting the cat to cigarette smoke, household sprays and dusty cat litter where possible.

Treatment may include:

- **anti-inflammatory drugs** in the form of steroids. These can be given in tablet form, by injection or by use of an inhaler. Inhalers that are specifically designed for cats are available and most cats tolerate them well – this may be easier than giving tablets in the long term. Anti-inflammatory drugs help to reduce the inflammation within the airways and help to dissolve mucus
- **bronchodilators** that open up narrowed airways can be used alongside anti-inflammatory drugs. They too can be in the form of tablets, injection or inhalers
- **mucolytics** can be added to your cat's food as a powder. They help to break up the mucus which is produced in the airways

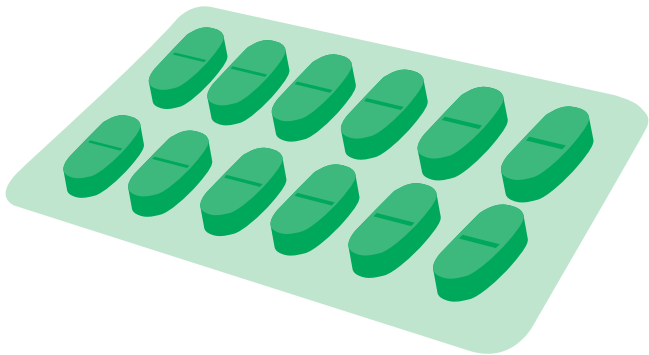
What does the future hold?

In the majority of cases feline asthma can be well controlled with appropriate medication and the affected cat will lead a normal healthy life.

However, it is important that treatment is started as soon as possible as an ongoing, untreated condition may permanently damage and scar the airways and sudden asthma attacks can prove fatal.

Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>



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Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)

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