

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD)



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDE 2



What is FLUTD?

FLUTD describes a collection of common conditions that affect the bladder and/or urethra – the narrow tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body. It includes the condition commonly known as cystitis – inflammation of the bladder – and does not usually involve the kidneys. The signs shown by cats with FLUTD are often similar, regardless of the cause.

Which cats are most susceptible to FLUTD?

FLUTD can be seen in cats of any age, although it is more frequently seen in middle-aged and overweight cats, particularly if they take little exercise, use an indoor litter tray, have limited access to outside and eat a dry diet. FLUTD occurs equally in male and female cats but neutered cats of both sexes are more susceptible and males have a greater risk of complete urinary tract blockage. Cats with diabetes mellitus or pre-existing kidney disease are more susceptible to urinary tract infections.

What causes FLUTD?

There are many causes of FLUTD including:

- urinary stones or crystals that form in the urine and irritate the lining of the bladder
- urethral plugs that form in the male cat's urethra, causing a physical obstruction
- spasm of the muscle in the wall of the urethra
- abnormalities in the structure of the urinary tract
- stress and behavioural problems
- cancer of the bladder or urethra
- disease affecting the nerves controlling the bladder
- bacterial and viral infections

In 60 to 70 per cent of cases it is not possible to find an underlying cause – this is called idiopathic FLUTD.

What are the signs of FLUTD?

Cats with FLUTD usually show one or more of the following signs:

- difficulty and pain when passing urine
- passing urine more frequently
- passing only small amounts of urine
- passing urine in inappropriate places
- straining before, during or after urination
- passing bloody urine
- crying when passing urine
- behavioural changes and/or aggression
- inability to pass any urine

How is FLUTD diagnosed?

Reaching a specific diagnosis of FLUTD can be challenging but all known causes need to be ruled out before a final diagnosis of idiopathic disease is reached. This can be frustrating for the cat owner but it's important to ensure that the right treatment is selected.

Your vet will take a thorough history to establish all the signs your cat is exhibiting and when they are displaying them. A full physical examination will then be carried out, allowing your vet to feel the bladder and assess the other organs. A urine sample will be collected and examined to determine its concentration, acidity and the presence of any crystals, protein, blood cells and bacteria.

Treatment is often started based on these results, but if the signs recur or do not improve, further investigations will be required. These may include x-rays or ultrasound examinations to assess the bladder, urethra and kidneys and to locate the exact site of the problem and the cause. In some cases it may be necessary for a sample of the bladder to be taken for examination at a laboratory.

How is FLUTD treated?

Treatment of FLUTD should be directed towards the underlying cause if one has been diagnosed, for example:

A **bacterial infection** will be treated with antibiotics – further urine samples may be required to show the infection is no longer present before stopping the antibiotics.

The presence of **urinary crystals or stones** may require you to put your cat on a prescribed diet specifically designed to dissolve them. Surgery may be needed to remove certain stones which do not dissolve.

A **urethral obstruction** will be dealt with as a medical emergency because as well as being painful it can be life-threatening. Complete blockage of the urethra can lead to urine backing up to the kidneys and affecting their function. Your cat will need to be unblocked immediately, usually under general anaesthesia. They will probably remain hospitalised for a few days after the blockage has been cleared.

If no specific cause can be identified, it is important to treat the signs and address long-term management. The following may help:

Reducing stress as this may be a 'flare factor'. Stress can arise from changes in diet, environment and weather. It can also be caused by overcrowding or bullying, owner stress and disruption – including new animals or people in the home. Stress associated with urination is particularly significant. Unsuitable positioning or content of the litter tray, or competition for it, can trigger FLUTD. A pheromone diffuser from your vet may help.

Increasing water consumption to dilute the urine will help with all causes of cystitis. Always ensure there is free access to water and the following ideas may help:

- changing your cat's diet to tinned food, or moistening dry food
- using water fountains
- leaving a tap dripping
- using ceramic bowls instead of plastic or metal, as these may taint the water
- supplying multiple bowls or glasses of water
- using distilled/bottled water or flavoured broths – check with your vet to ensure the flavouring is safe for short or long-term use

Controlled weight loss and increasing exercise

– for long-term control

Medical therapy issued by the vet, such as:

- anti-inflammatory drugs may help to relieve pain in some cases
- relief of urethral spasm with drugs that relax the muscles
- antidepressant drugs may be beneficial in some severe/chronic cases
- a supplement to repair the protective inner lining of the bladder

What does the future hold?

The prognosis of FLUTD is variable and depends on the underlying cause. Most cats with FLUTD lead a relatively normal life with appropriate lifestyle changes and occasional long-term treatment. It is important to note that all current treatments for idiopathic FLUTD merely relieve the symptoms and it may be a matter of trial and error to

find the best treatment for your cat.

The best results are generally gained by instigating a number of changes from the above list. Unfortunately, there is no cure in the majority of cases.



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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