

Lower Urinary Tract Disease in Cats

Pet Health Network Contributors

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Overview

Disease of the lower urinary tract (bladder and urethra) is a very common problem in cats and may be due to a single or, more commonly, a combination of factors.

These include:

- Idiopathies (unknown causes)
- [Urinary crystals or stones](#)
- Bacteria and other microbes (viral, fungal), which cause urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Anatomic or neurologic abnormalities
- Cancer

Stress may also play a role in some cats.

Whatever the underlying cause, the symptoms are the same as the cat's lower urinary tract responds in a similar and predictable way: inflammation and the pain that goes with it. Unfortunately, cats are not complainers and often instinctually hide their discomfort, making it difficult to see that they are sick. There are, however, some tell-tale signs that your pet has a lower urinary tract problem.

These include:

- Urinating outside the litter box
- Frequent urination with little or no urine
- Crying during urination
- Blood in the urine
- Frequent licking of the genitals, especially immediately after urinating
- Straining to urinate

In some cases—especially in male cats as they have a much longer and more narrow urethra than females—an obstruction occurs, which can lead to extreme discomfort and eventual damage to the kidneys; it could even lead to rupture of the urinary bladder, if the problem is not treated immediately. This is a true emergency!

Diagnostic tests, as outlined below, are required to

differentiate uncomplicated UTI, which typically responds well to antibiotic therapy, from all the other causes of lower urinary tract disease.

Diagnosis/Treatment

If you suspect your cat may have lower urinary tract disease, it's important to bring her to the veterinarian right away. Your veterinarian will perform a thorough physical exam, take a complete history, and may recommend some diagnostic tests.

These tests could include:

- A urinalysis and urine culture to assess for the presence of a urinary tract infection and to evaluate the kidney's ability to concentrate urine
- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count (CBC) to rule out blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your pet isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- A thyroid test to determine if the thyroid gland is producing too much thyroid hormone
- X-rays of the urinary tract to identify if stones or other abnormalities are present
- Abdominal ultrasound to evaluate the urinary tract and identify if stones or other abnormalities are present
- If your cat has been diagnosed with lower urinary tract disease, your veterinarian will want to treat any underlying condition that exists as well as treating the lower urinary tract disease itself. Your veterinarian will determine the right approach for your dear pet; some options they may suggest are:
 - Fluid therapy to help flush the kidneys and urinary tract
 - Antibiotics if there is evidence of a bacterial infection
 - Pain medication, if needed
 - A prescription diet to help prevent future recurrences
 - Management changes to decrease stress

Prevention

While you may not be able to prevent your pet from

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initially developing lower urinary tract disease, you may be able to help prevent recurrence of the disease with the right diet and diligent care. It is very important to follow all instructions, including giving all medications and coming in for follow-up visits and tests.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.