

Asthma in Cats

Overview

Feline asthma, sometimes referred to as allergic bronchitis, is very similar to the asthma we humans get. Asthma is an allergic reaction that causes spasms in the airway. These spasms can lead to swelling and difficulty in breathing. For some cats, this can be a chronic problem, while for others it can be seasonal or can come and go inexplicably. In some instances, once a cat's airway is restricted, your cat's ability to breathe can become life-threatening in just minutes.

Cats of all ages and breeds can be affected by asthma. It can be triggered by stress or simply by the environment the cat lives in.

Some common triggers of feline asthma are:

- Grass and pollen
- Feline [heartworm](#) disease
- Cat litter (clay, pine, cedar, etc.)
- Food, household cleaners, and sprays
- Smoke (cigarettes, fireplaces, candles, etc.)
- Dust, dust [mites](#), mold
- Perfumes and cosmetics

Signs

Cats experiencing an asthma attack can show very few signs of distress, and sometimes the signs are not obvious.

These can include:

- [Coughing/Hacking](#)
- Wheezing
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Frequent swallowing
- Gurgling throat
- Open-mouth breathing
- Taking quick breaths
- Increased pulse
- [Runny eyes](#)

Diagnosis/Treatment

If you suspect your pet has asthma, you should contact your veterinarian immediately. They will conduct a physical examination and review your cat's history. They may recommend tests to help identify why your cat is showing signs of asthma, and to see if asthma is really the underlying cause.

These tests may include:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver and pancreatic function as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count to evaluate if there are enough red blood cells, and to rule out infection and other blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to evaluate hydration status and choose proper fluid supplements, if your pet is dehydrated
- Feline heartworm testing to rule out heartworms
- Urine tests to rule out urinary tract infections and evaluate the kidney's ability to concentrate urine
- A fecal examination
- Radiographs (x-rays) of the chest to visually evaluate the lungs and heart

Whether your cat's asthma is a sudden condition or chronic, it cannot be completely cured. Fortunately, cats with asthma often do very well with appropriate treatment.

Options may include one or more of the following:

- Medications to help regulate your pet's breathing, such as steroids or bronchodilators
- Oxygen therapy in hospital or at home
- Removing the allergen, if possible, such as changing litter or food

Preventing Asthma

Since asthma is usually caused by an allergic reaction, identifying and removing the allergen (if possible) may help to reduce or prevent future problems. However, some asthma attacks are brought on by other conditions, such as stress, so focusing on alleviating stress can also help, as well. The best way to prevent asthma attacks is to work with your veterinarian to identify what the right plan is for your best friend.

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.