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Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Is your cat straining to urinate? Crying out in pain while urinating? Trying to urinate more frequently? Passing bloody urine? If so, your cat is suffering from Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD). Other signs of this disease may include excessive licking of the genital area and urinating outside the litter box and in inappropriate locations.

How did my cat get this?

The condition can affect cats of any age and sex, however FLUTD is most commonly seen in middle-aged, overweight cats that get little exercise, have restricted access to outdoors, and are fed on dry food. Your veterinarian will perform a thorough physical examination on your cat to determine whether physical trauma, anatomical abnormalities, or dysfunction of the nervous system could be factors contributing to your cat's symptoms. A urine sample will then be obtained for analysis. Further testing may include bloodwork, x-rays to find and locate urinary stones or tumors, ultrasound to detect any bladder lesions, and urine culture to identify any organisms that may be the culprit.

Inflammation of the urinary bladder (feline idiopathic cystitis) is the most common cause of these signs in cats. The disease arises spontaneously and the cause is, for the most part, unknown, though stress is thought to play a role. Diagnosis is made after ruling out other disorders including stones, obstructions and infections.

FLUTD can be caused by urethral plugs (pasty, gritty material composed of minerals, cells and mucus-like proteins) or uroliths (stones formed from a collection of minerals in the urinary tract). Factors influencing urolith formation in cats include a diet that produces alkaline urine, feeding only dry food, reduced water intake, infrequent urination, and concurrent bacterial infections. Depending on the type of stones involved, uroliths can be eliminated with a special diet or may need to be flushed out with sterile fluids under anaesthesia or sedation. Surgery may be required to remove bladder stones.

A life-threatening obstruction may occur when uroliths lodge in the urethra, or when the urethra is obstructed by a urethral plug. Male cats are particularly prone to urethral obstructions due to their longer and narrower urethra. A "blocked" cat will frequently strain but produce little or no urine and is an EMERGENCY! The inability to excrete wastes causes a build-up of toxins and an electrolyte imbalance that causes heart failure, and eventually leads to a loss of consciousness and death within 48 hours. Treatment involves passing a catheter up the urethra to empty the bladder and relieve the obstruction, rehydration with intravenous fluids, antibiotics to prevent bacterial infection, and drugs to promote bladder function. Your cat will need to be hospitalized afterwards for close monitoring of urine output and to ensure he doesn't become blocked again. Unfortunately FLUTD has a 50-70% rate of recurrence.

What can YOU do to reduce the chances of your cat getting FLUTD or prevent recurrence of FLUTD?

- ✓ Feed small, frequent meals at regular intervals
- ✓ Feed wet food
- ✓ Feed acidifying diets or scientifically formulated "urinary health" diets that prevent the formation of crystals and reduce the chance of urethral obstruction (only if your cat is diagnosed with FLUTD)
- ✓ Provide clean, fresh water at all times
- ✓ Minimise stress by avoiding changes in routine
- ✓ Provide an adequate number of litter boxes
- ✓ Keep litter boxes clean and in quiet, safe areas of the house

For more advice if you suspect your pet is showing any of these signs, or to book an appointment, just contact the friendly team at Cowra Veterinary Centre on 6341 3113.

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