



Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD)

Cystitis is a general term referring to inflammation in the urinary bladder. The term cystitis does not imply a specific underlying cause. In cats, diseases of the lower urinary tract (the bladder and urethra) are grouped under the term 'feline lower urinary tract disease' (FLUTD).

What are the signs of FLUTD?

Typical signs in cats with FLUTD are those of inflammation and irritation of the lower urinary tract, including:

- Increased frequency and urgency of urination.
- Urinating indoors or in unusual places such as the shower recess
- Difficulty in urinating (spending a long time straining on the litter tray while passing only small quantities of urine).
- The presence of blood in the urine or blood spots in the litter tray.
- Occasionally complete obstruction to the passage of urine (straining persistently without producing any urine).

It is important to seek urgent veterinary attention as complete blockage to the flow of urine is life-threatening if left untreated.

What causes FLUTD?

There are a vast number of potential causes of FLUTD, including bacterial infections, bladder stones and cancer, however the most common disease in cats is 'idiopathic' FLUTD, where there is no identifiable underlying cause.

The main factor that contributes to idiopathic FLUTD is stress. Other factors that may predispose are increased body weight, lack of exercise, confinement indoors, reduced water intake and urinating infrequently (e.g. dirty litter tray cats may hold on). These idiopathic cases have to be differentiated from other potential medical causes so that appropriate treatment can be given.

How is FLUTD diagnosed?

The initial diagnosis of FLUTD is based on behavioural signs of lower urinary tract inflammation and analysis of a urine sample. This will confirm the presence of inflammation, infection or blood.

Where clinical signs are persistent or recurrent, a number of investigations may be required to differentiate idiopathic FLUTD from the other known causes of urinary tract inflammation.

These investigations may include:

- Bacterial culture of a urine sample
- Blood samples to look for other evidence of urinary tract disease or systemic disease
- Radiographs (x-rays) and/or ultrasound examination of the bladder and urethra

The information from these investigations should help to identify a specific treatable underlying cause if one is present.

What is the treatment for FLUTD?

This depends on the underlying cause. For example:

- Cases of idiopathic disease may respond to treatment with anti-inflammatory or analgesic ('pain-relieving') drugs, but it is crucial that you only use drugs specifically prescribed by your veterinary surgeon, as many human products are extremely dangerous to use in cats. Dietary therapy and anti-depressant medications may also be very effective if chronic stress is involved.
- Bacterial infections of the lower urinary tract, although uncommon in cats, will usually respond well to antibiotic therapy.
- If a cat develops a blocked urethra (this almost exclusively occurs in males), emergency treatment is required to remove the blockage, which may require flushing of the urethra while the cat is given a short anaesthetic. Most cats will need to stay in hospital for several days.
- If bladder stones are present they may have to be removed surgically or, depending on their type, they may be able to be dissolved by using a special diet, or dietary additive.



There is no universal treatment for FLUTD. Each case has to be investigated to determine the underlying cause, and then the treatment has to be tailored to the individual cat. Sometimes despite appropriate investigation and treatment, clinical signs may still recur, requiring further therapy.

How can FLUTD be prevented?

It is impossible to completely prevent diseases of the lower urinary tract occurring. However, a multi-modal approach involving several therapies may be beneficial in reducing the number of attacks of idiopathic FLUTD.

- Prescription diets (only available at vet clinics) including Royal Canin 'Urinary Support' and Hills C/d Stress
- Adding water to food or feeding canned food to promote increased urine production and flushing
- Minimising stressful events is very important in cats. Stressful events may include indoor noises such as buzzers or loud music, traffic or thunder, visitors to your home, tension or hostility between cats in your home and seeing unfamiliar cats outdoors.
- Modifications to the cat's home environment including providing multiple litter trays and water bowls in low-traffic locations. Access to flowing water fountains is sometimes necessary to promote water intake
- Addressing behaviour issues and use of appeasing pheromones, anti-depressant medications and anti-inflammatory medications.
- A perineal urethrostomy ('boy to girl operation') is recommended for male cats that have recurrent blockages of their urethra. This involves surgically removing the penis and approximately 3cm of urethra leaving a large opening for urine to be excreted from.