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Ask the Vet



.....about Feline Cystitis by Brenda Cosby, DVM

One of the most common problems that you will encounter in caring for cats is the management of cystitis. Frequent signs of this disease are urgency to urinate, and difficulty or pain on urination.

In cystitis the bladder has become inflamed and is very sensitive. Even a small amount of urine in the bladder will cause the cat to feel that he needs to urinate. Thus, he will jump into the litter box and strain to pass just a few drops several times daily. Cats will often urinate in unusual areas of the house; just outside the litter box, in the bathtub, on the new carpet---wherever the spasms happen to hit.

While the exact cause of cystitis is still debated, most veterinarians agree that a low mineral (ash) diet is an important factor in controlling the disease. When the urine of an affected cat is examined microscopically crystals are often found. These crystals will irritate the bladder and even cause bleeding.

Most often these are truvite crystals (magnesium, ammonium, phosphate). So it makes sense that decreasing the amount of these minerals in the diet will decrease their concentration in the urine and make the formation of crystals less likely.

Encouraging water drinking will also help dilute out any crystals.

Cats that hold their urine due to scheduling changes at home or a dirty litter box will tend to have more concentrated urine and crystals are more likely to form. So it is especially important to keep the box clean.

The greatest danger to cats, and often the hardest thing to determine is whether or not crystals have formed plugs that have actually blocked the urinary system. Males are especially susceptible to this due to the longer, thinner urethra; but females can block up as well. The crystals concentrate in one area and form plugs that can keep the cat from passing urine normally----or maybe not at all!!!

The cat will sit and strain with little result, he may also cry out in pain as the bladder grows larger and larger. This can happen in a two to three day period---making for a seriously ill cat. People have been known to assume that a straining cat was merely constipated with disastrous consequences.

The urine toxins will build up in the bloodstream and the cat will be sluggish, nauseous, and may eventually progress to seizures and death if the blockage is not relieved. This is why it is so important to monitor the litter box daily for urine output and consult a veterinarian if there are any questions.

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