

FELINE IDIOPATHIC CYSTITIS & STRESS

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WHAT IS IT?

The lower urinary tract involves the bladder and urethra. The most common diagnosis in younger cats with 10 years of age or less that suffer from feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) is feline idiopathic cystitis (FIC). If all the known causes of the disease have been excluded via diagnostics, the condition is referred to as FIC. FIC consists of a non-infectious inflammation of the bladder by an unknown cause. Although, it is usually associated with a defect in the ability of some cats to handle stress. Not every cat develops FIC after a stressful event. However, some cats are predisposed to it neurologically. Cats that have stress issues more frequently have an increased chance of developing a problematic bladder and recurrent cystitis. Approximately 50% of cats that experience an acute episode of FIC have a recurrent episode within 1 year, but FIC can also be persistent.

The mechanism behind this disease involves the lining of the bladder which protects the bladder tissue from the urine it contains. The lining can get damaged when the cat is going through an anxiety episode. The bladder tissue can be affected by variations in pH, crystals, toxins or irritants that have been filtered by the kidneys into the urine. When the lining becomes damaged due to the anxiety the cat is experiencing, the bladder tissue becomes exposed to these, resulting in inflammation.

This could lead to a potential complication of FIC in male cats, urethral obstruction, due to the urethra being extremely narrow and incapable of handling the increased amount of mucus secretion and normal crystals in the urine. If urine flow is blocked, toxins start to increase and death can occur in a matter of days. Thus, full or partial urethral obstruction is a life-threatening emergency and must be treated immediately. FIC may also be considered as a predisposing factor in cats developing urolithiasis or bacterial cystitis.

CAUSES

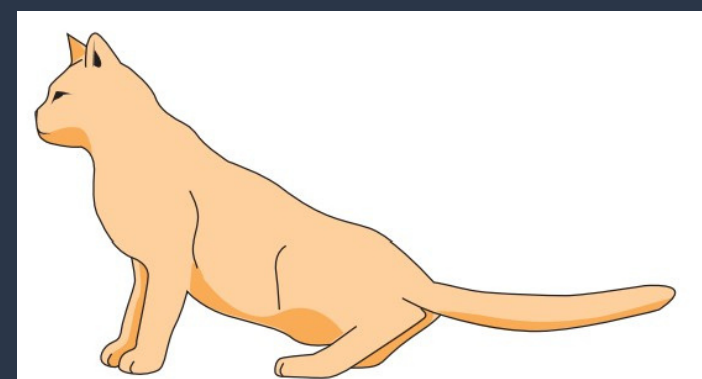
- Stressful events (e.g. boarding, travelling, a new pet or baby in the home, moving to a new home, house sitters, or cold/rainy weather, intercat aggression)
- Diet (e.g. overweight cats have more predisposition, diet changes)

DIAGNOSIS

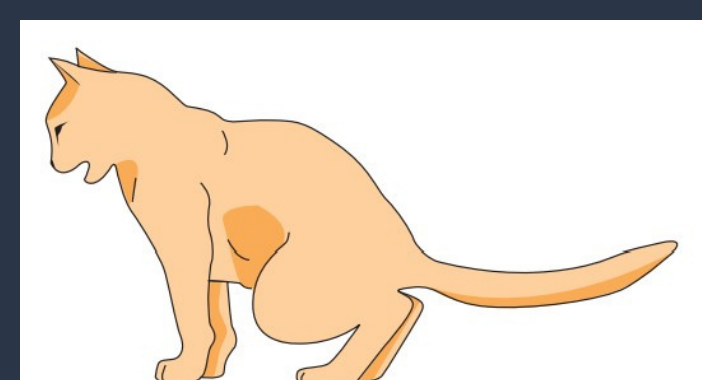
- There is no specific diagnostic test for FIC.
- Diagnosis is based on exclusion of negative tests and clinical picture of the patient.
- Radiographs or ultrasounds can help rule out anatomical abnormalities.
- Urinalysis can help rule out sedimentation or bacterial infections.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Painful urination
- Urinating in unusual places
- Straining or not urinating
- Bloody urine
- Increased urination frequency
- Swelling
- Change in behaviour
- Fussier
- Becoming more distant
- Licking of genital or abdominal area



Normal urinating posture



Strained urinating posture

Images by Hill's Pet Nutrition

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PREVENTION

Approximately 50% of cats will have another episode of FIC within 1 year. Although, it is not possible to predict which cats will suffer from it again. Cats with an increased reactivity and sensitivity to stress must live in a predictable environment with the same food, same schedule and private spaces to rest and do the basic needs, especially in multiple-pet households. Any change in the cat's routine must be introduced slowly, and this includes changes in food. Stress can be minimized by providing an enriched environment with times for playing, and allowing the cat to choose the areas for playing, resting, eating, and eliminating. Provide water at all times and ensure that is consumed adequately. Seek veterinary help promptly if you suspect that your cat has any signs of FIC or urinary tract disease.



TREATMENT

There are numerous medical treatments that a veterinarian can choose for treating the symptoms. Analgesics help reduce pain and discomfort. Anti-inflammatories reduce the swelling, and antispasmodics relax the inflamed urethra, allowing the urine to pass. Unfortunately, there is still no specific treatment to shorten the duration of the FIC episode. Often the veterinarian will make an approach by feeding only canned food and recommending environmental enrichment or a reduction of any potential source of stress. Since the 1980s, feline urinary diets have been found to be helpful in reducing the incidence of feline cystitis and its recurrent episodes. This is believed to be due to its increased water content and the pleasant feeling involved in the feeding process. Increasing water consumption is recommended to reduce the chances of recurrent episodes and sediments in the urine.



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