

Feline Urinary Problems

- Cats can develop serious urinary problems, so it's important to learn how to recognize trouble signs early.
- If your cat is unable to urinate, this is an emergency requiring immediate veterinary attention.
- A veterinary checkup is very important for a cat that changes his or her litterbox habits.
- There are several effective methods for treating and preventing urinary problems in cats.

The Basics

Here's how your cat's urinary system works. The kidneys filter waste and toxins from the blood. These waste products then become part of the urine in the kidneys. Urine leaves the kidneys through narrow tubes called *ureters*, which empty into the bladder. When your cat urinates, the bladder is emptied through a tube called the *urethra*. Feline urinary problems are usually grouped into conditions of the lower urinary tract (the bladder and urethra) and the upper urinary tract (the kidneys and ureters).

Urinary problems can make it difficult for your cat to store or pass (eliminate) urine. Storage problems result in inappropriate leakage of urine; causes of storage problems include bladder muscle problems, nervous system problems, and injury to the urinary system. Elimination problems involve a decreased ability or an inability to urinate; causes include blockage by stones or growths, muscle problems, and nervous system problems. Cats with elimination problems usually try to urinate often but only release a small amount of urine. Urinary blockage is an emergency requiring immediate veterinary attention.

Signs and Diagnosis

A thorough examination and history of your cat can help your veterinarian determine whether your cat has a urinary problem. Ultrasonography, radiography (x-rays), and urine and blood testing may help make a diagnosis.

Here are some signs that your cat may have a urinary problem:

- Frequent trips to the litterbox, where your cat may or may not urinate
- Urinating outside the litterbox
- Blood in the urine
- Crying or straining when urinating
- Inability to urinate
- Urinating smaller amounts
- Disinterest in food or water
- Hiding
- Disinterest in being handled
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain

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Treatment

There are several effective treatments for feline urinary problems. Treatment may include surgery, a special diet, and/or medication, depending on the cause of the problem. Cats undergoing treatment need to be monitored and tested regularly.

Prevention

To help ensure that your cat's urinary system is healthy, become familiar with your cat's eating, drinking, and litterbox habits. Your cat is a creature of habit, so he or she probably goes to the litterbox around the same time every day. A change in your cat's habits may be a clue that something is wrong. Watch out for anything suspicious, such as a litterbox that isn't being used.

Common Conditions

The following can help maintain your cat's urinary system:

- Supply plenty of fresh water, and keep the bowl clean.
- Provide an adequate number of clean litterboxes (one per cat plus one more litterbox in multicat households).
- Encourage your cat to play and exercise, and keep him or her at a healthy weight.
- Bring your cat to your veterinarian at the first sign of trouble.