

One of the most common conditions I see in cats is called lower urinary tract disease. The following is information from the Cornell University Feline Health Center and the American Veterinary Medical Association that describes the signs, causes and recommendations for preventing this condition.

Lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) describes a variety of conditions that affect the bladder and urethra of cats. Cats with FLUTD most often show signs of difficulty and pain when urinating, increased frequency of urination, and blood in the urine. Cats with FLUTD also tend to lick themselves excessively and may urinate outside the litter box, often on cool, smooth surfaces like a tile floor or a bathtub.

While FLUTD can occur at any age, it is usually seen in middle-aged, overweight cats that get little exercise, use an indoor litter box, have little or no outdoor access, or eat a dry diet. Factors such as emotional or environment stress, multi-cat households, and abrupt changes in daily routine may also increase the risk that a cat will develop FLUTD.

Major Signs of Lower Urinary Tract Disease include:

- Straining to urinate
- Frequent and/or prolonged attempts to urinate
- Crying out while urinating
- Excessive licking of the genital area
- Urinating outside the litter box
- Blood in the urine

Note that cats with a **urethral obstruction** will also show these signs but will pass little or no urine and become increasingly distressed. *A urethral obstruction is an emergency and requires immediate veterinary treatment.* (See section on *Urethral Obstruction.*)

Because FLUTD has many causes, it can be difficult to diagnose. Based on your cat's symptoms, your veterinarian will do a physical examination and most likely will run a urinalysis. If the cause is still not identified, tests such as bloodwork, x-rays, and additional urine tests may be recommended.

One possible cause of FLUTD is the formation of urinary stones, also called uroliths. These are collections of minerals that form in the urinary tract of cats. X-rays or ultrasound are usually needed to diagnose urinary stones

The most serious problem associated with urinary function is when a cat's urethra becomes partly or totally blocked. Urethral obstruction is a potentially life-threatening condition caused either by urethral stones or by urethral plugs (the latter are made of a soft material containing minerals, cells, and mucus-like protein).

Male cats (neutered or intact) are at greater risk for urethral obstruction than females because their urethra is longer and narrower. This is a true medical emergency, and any cat suspected of suffering from this condition must receive *immediate veterinary attention*

Feline idiopathic cystitis (FIC)—also called interstitial cystitis—is the most common diagnosis in cats with lower urinary tract disease. The disease is not fully understood and may involve several body systems in addition to the urinary system.

Fortunately, most cats recover from FLUTD and never, or only occasionally, develop it again. In some cats, however, the condition often reoccurs. To help reduce the chances of recurrence:

- Feed small meals on a frequent basis.
- Consult with your veterinarian about the best diet for your cat. Many commercial diets are acceptable, but some urinary conditions respond better to specialized diets.
- Provide clean, fresh water at all times.
- Provide an adequate number of litter boxes (usually one more than the number of cats in the household).
- Keep litter boxes in quiet, safe areas of the house.
- Keep litter boxes clean.
- Minimize major changes in routine.