

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD)

What is it?

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) is a broad term that is used to cover a number of conditions associated with the feline lower urinary tract. In a nutshell, these cats have problems urinating. Both male and female cats can develop FLUTD. Male cats can go on to develop partial or total blockage of the urethra / bladder or **blocked cat syndrome**. This is incredibly uncommon in female cats. If your cat is unable to urinate, this can lead to build up of urinary toxins within the body, bladder rupture, and death if left untreated.

What are the causes of FLUTD?

FLUTD is a multi-factorial disease with no single cause. Approximately 50% of cases have no known cause, 20% are caused by little urinary stones, 20% by urethral plugs (mucus secretions from the urinary tract) and 2-10% by bacterial infections (cats > 10 years old are more likely to have an infection than younger cats). Cancerous processes also occasionally occur in cats. Factors found to contribute to the development of FLUTD include stress, low water consumption, being overweight, being male neutered, using litter trays and having a sedentary indoor lifestyle. Without management of these risk factors, FLUTD can be a recurrent disease (please see below for tips on controlling risk factors). Between 40 and 65% of cats will show signs of FLUTD again within 1-2 years.

What signs should you look for?

Affected cats urinate more frequently than normal and often in inappropriate places, they may adopt the posture to urinate and stay there for some period producing little or no urine or their urine may be red. Attempts to urinate may be painful and a cat with FLUTD may vocalise, pace or display other signs of anxiety (such as hiding) under beds. They may also lick the area under the tail. As the bladder becomes blocked, your male cat may become lethargic, stop eating, start vomiting and eventually collapse.

How is FLUTD treated?

This all depends on what stage of disease your cat has reached before veterinary intervention. If your cats bladder is blocked, your cat will need to be sedated or anaesthetised so as a urinary catheter can be placed to unblock the bladder and allow your pet to urinate. Your pet may also be started on intravenous fluids and given other medications to help keep them comfortable and to help the bladder empty. Blood and urine tests may be performed and x-rays may be necessary. FLUTD cats need to be monitored in hospital to make sure that they continue to pass urine.

If your cats bladder is not blocked, management may consist of pain relief, urine testing and attention to controlling the risk factors of FLUTD (see below).

What should you do after your pet is discharged from hospital?

Your pet's toileting habits should be monitored. If they show any discomfort urinating or if you feel there are frequent toilet visits with little or no urine production, your pet should be re-examined. Attention should be given to controlling the risk factors of FLUTD.

Tips for Controlling the Risk Factors Associated With FLUTD

1. Manage Stress

Cats like routines and don't cope well with change. Stressors for cats include introduction of another cat (to the household or neighbourhood), change in routine, addition of a new family member and lack of mental and physical stimulation. Stress can be minimized by:

- ☺ Having a regular schedule of feeding, playing and interacting.
- ☺ Avoiding rapid changes in routine.
- ☺ Provision of perches, scratching posts and private areas for cats to hide away from other cats.
- ☺ Providing at least one litter tray per cat. In multi-cat households, it is recommended to have 1 per cat and 1 extra.
- ☺ Use of pheromones such as Feliway and other behaviour modifying medications (antidepressants). Please discuss this further with your regular veterinarian.



2. Increase Water Consumption

The best way of getting cats to drink more water is to provide their food in a wet rather than dry formulation. Wet or tinned food is approximately 80% water. Cats fed wet food diets have been shown to produce up to twice as much urine as cats on dry food diets. This may assist to dilute out crystals and components of the plugs so that problems are less likely. Other ways to encourage water consumption include;

- ☺ Supplying running water devices - commercial forms of these are available. Alternatively some cats like to drink from the bottom of the shower or bath.
- ☺ Providing new sources of water eg. put full glasses of water in strategic places around the house. Cats often like to drink from human glasses.

3. Weight management

The number one rule of weight management is not to allow free access to food. Overweight cats should be offered food for 5-10 minutes twice daily. Restricted calorie diets may be required. If you want to change your cats' diet, it is best to do this slowly to allow the cat to adapt to the new taste. We would recommend that you seek the advice of your vet prior to commencement of weight management programs to avoid possible life threatening health risks. Other veterinary urinary diets may be required in FLUTD pets to help dissolve the urinary crystals or stones.

Regular physical activity also assists weight management. Encourage your cat to play with scrunched up paper on a string or cat toys. Consider teaching them to walk on a lead. Alternatively, you can make a cat "kong" by putting a little food inside an empty yoghurt container, taping another empty container upside down on top of it and putting some holes in the side of the containers to allow food to come out slowly. This will ensure that your cat expends some energy in getting its food.
