

Feline Idiopathic Lower Urinary Tract Disease (iFLUTD)

What is it?

This term describes a condition seen in cats that is typically self-limiting, unless the urethra becomes obstructed and blocks urine outflow, but commonly recurs. There is no uniformly effective treatment, but the strongest evidence for successful treatment is a combination of diet change and environmental management. The condition has also been known as:

- Feline Urologic Syndrome (FUS)
- Lower Urinary Tract Disease (LUTD)
- Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC)

What signs should I look out for?

- Blood in the urine
- Increased frequency of urination
- Slow and painful urination
- Inappropriate sites of urination

What causes it?

If we knew the answer to this, then we would not need to call it idiopathic! There are several theories, which include:

- As yet undetected infectious agents
- Excessive quantities of crystals in the urine
- Small out-pouchings of the bladder wall
- Interstitial cystitis

Whatever the cause, it is thought that the clinical signs are associated with local stimulation of pain fibres, deficiencies in the protective glycosaminoglycan (GAG) layer of the bladder wall and over-activity of the “stress” system in the body.

Risk Factors:

- Persians
- Obesity
- Young
- Neutered
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Eating dry food
- Stress

How do we treat it?

A huge number of treatments have been tried and this immediately alerts us to the fact that none of them work very well. It is well known that cats with clinical signs often get better within two to three days without treatment. However, it is very difficult to sit by and watch cats in distress with this condition and not try to help. Also, we want to try and prevent flare-ups in the future and reduce the risk of any “blockages” within the urinary tract as these have life-threatening consequences.

Currently, the top five favourite treatments are:

1. Feed a wet food - not always easy if your cat has always eaten biscuits!
2. Increase water intake.
3. Reduce stress.
4. Give synthetic GAGs.
5. Amitriptyline (only in unrelenting cases).

The usual approach to a cat showing symptoms of iFLUTD would be as follows:

1. Clinical examination to check the cat has not got obstructed urine outflow - this is especially important in male cats as they have narrower, longer and more bendy urethras than females, so become obstructed more easily.

2. A careful discussion with you as the owner to try and identify any trigger factors, and possible referral to a behaviour centre for full evaluation.
3. Laboratory examination of a urine sample to rule out infection and other possible identifiable underlying causes.
4. X-rays and/or an ultrasound scan to rule out stones, growths etc.
5. Change diet to a wet diet and increase water intake (just like your doctor encouraging you to drink plenty of water if you had cystitis!).
6. Oral analgesics (these may not actually help, but often make us feel better as we feel we are helping the cat).
7. GAG supplements (it is thought that these help in around 10% of cases).

True idiopathic cases will not be helped by giving antibiotics, and the use of antibiotics is best reserved until after a urine sample has been examined in the laboratory confirming an infection (the case then ceases to be idiopathic as a cause has been found ...).

Repeat tests

Your veterinary surgeon will often suggest repeating tests each time symptoms recur. This is because, although no cause may have been found for the symptoms your cat showed previously, it may well go on to have some other identifiable problem next time!

Other helpful things to do ...

Current thinking is summarised by something called MEMO, which stands for multimodal environmental modification, and recommends:

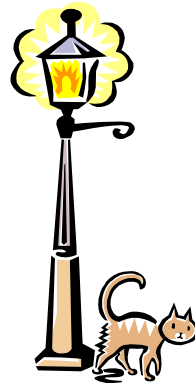
- Avoid punishing your cat for accidents
- Feed canned food and increase water intake
- Use unscented, clumping cat litter
- Improve litter tray management (one tray per cat, plus one extra - vary size and sites of litter trays)
- Environmental enrichment (provide "perches" at different heights)
- Increase interaction between cat and owner
- Identify and resolve any conflicts



By now, you probably realise that this is a very difficult illness for us to deal with, both as owner and veterinary surgeon, and will require a lot of co-operation between us to establish the best treatment and management plan for your cat, whose illness is likely to be a lifelong problem.

For further information, please visit:

www.indoorcat.org



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Quick Reference Guide



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