

General Practice Service
Willows Information Sheets

Cystitis in cats





What is special about cystitis in cats?

Unlike dogs and people, cystitis in cats is frequently caused by stress rather than by an infection.

Whilst cystitis in female cats is painful and upsetting, it can actually turn into a life-threatening condition in tom cats if the urethra (the way out of the bladder) is blocked up by swelling, blood clots or crystals. Those cats are absolutely unable to pass urine, which leads to the bladder overfilling. This in turn causes back-pressure which can ultimately lead to kidney failure and collapse. Any male cat that seems unable to pass urine should be seen by a veterinary surgeon immediately.

Why do cats get cystitis?

There are a number of possible causes of cystitis, but the majority of young cats which develop cystitis do so as a result of stress. Sometimes an obvious reason for the underlying stress can be identified, such as the house being decorated or another cat or a dog moving in, but often it is difficult to recognise the actual cause of the stress. Once cats have developed this type of cystitis, they are very prone to having further bouts of it in the future and in some cases management of some variety is necessary to prevent further episodes.

A smaller proportion of cats, especially elderly individuals or those with chronic problems, such as kidney disease, develop cystitis due to infection, generally by bacteria.

There are several other reasons why cystitis may develop, and these include bladder stones, tumours or toxic cystitis. Such cases are uncommon, however.

What are the clinical signs of cystitis?

All types of cystitis have similar clinical signs, not all of which are necessarily observed in every case:

- Frequent visits to the litter tray
- Passing very small amounts of urine on the litter tray or even being unable to pass anything at all
- Accidents in the house or urination in inappropriate places
- Bloody urine
- Painful urination – some cats cry when urinating
- Some cats are restless or seem off colour

How is the disease diagnosed?

The clinical signs are very often already suggestive of cystitis. To rule out other causes and to identify which type of cystitis is affecting your cat, a general physical examination and also further tests, such as a urine analysis, are usually necessary. In some cases blood tests, radiographs/ultrasound examination or other tests may be required, too.

A male cat that is unable to urinate due to complete blockage of the bladder needs to be treated as an emergency.

How is cystitis in cats treated?

If stress-related cystitis is diagnosed, the treatment usually consists of pain relief, relaxation of the cramped bladder muscle and glucosamines, which seemed to soothe the sore inside layer of the bladder. We also strongly advise that cats which are prone to cystitis are fed only on wet food. This is an exception to the general rule, as

we usually recommend feeding cats and dogs on dry food. However, we know that the overall water intake for the patient is better when wet food is given, and a slightly more dilute urine can help to prevent further episodes of cystitis. If possible, small amounts of water can be added to the wet food or the cat may be encouraged to drink by flavouring the drinking water with small amounts of something tasty e.g. salt-free chicken broth or tuna. Anything that increases the water intake in such cats is beneficial.

Male cats that are unable to pass urine often need much more intensive treatment. Usually such patients need emergency sedation or a general anaesthetic to allow us to unblock the bladder and achieve urine flow. In some cases, especially if the problem has been overlooked for a little while, intensive care may be necessary for several days and unfortunately not all cats with this condition manage to pull through. The earlier the condition is treated, the better.

My cat has cystitis – what is the outlook?

While some cats only ever have one episode of cystitis in their life, once a cat has developed stress-related cystitis he or she is prone to develop further episodes when stressed. It is advisable always to feed such cats on wet food and encourage drinking as much as possible. It is also important to monitor such cats closely this applies especially to tom cats as they are prone to becoming blocked. In some cases ongoing management or medication is required.

Can dogs get this type of cystitis?

Dogs do not get the stress-related type of cystitis which we see in cats. They certainly can develop cystitis, but it is usually due to an infection or other underlying cause. The signs of cystitis in dogs are similar to those in cats (see above), and if you become aware of such symptoms, you should seek veterinary advice at an early stage.

If you have any queries concerns about your dog or cat and cystitis, please do not hesitate to [contact us](#).

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