



303-948-5000



Does Your Cat Have Lower Urinary Tract Disease?

Has your cat ever suffered from a disorder of the lower urinary tract? Cats occasionally develop such problems, and the signs include frequent urination, straining, urinating outside the litter box, bloody urine, and at times inability to urinate. These signs have different causes. Thus, there is a need for evaluation of each cat as an individual to determine the proper form of treatment and prevention. Possible causes of Lower Urinary Tract Disease (LUTD) include urinary stones or crystals, bacterial and viral infections, birth defects, tumors, and neuromuscular diseases. **In more than 50% of cats, it may not be possible to determine the underlying cause(s).**

Initially, we will examine your cat, get a detailed history, and perform a urinalysis. The urinalysis helps us determine if your cat has bacteria, crystals, white and red blood cells.

Only about 20% of cats with LUTD have **bacterial infections**. They are usually easily treated with antibiotics. Some bacterial infections are recurrent and we may recommend longer treatment or performing a culture & sensitivity test to determine the exact bacteria and what antibiotic it is sensitive to.

Another cause of LUTD symptoms is **crystals** in the urine. There are different types of crystals that can form, but the most common are **struvite crystals**. These form when cats are fed lower quality diets (usually purchased from the grocery store) that cause the urine to become alkaline (high pH). Premium diets found in pet stores contain urinary acidifiers which prevent struvite formation. If your cat is diagnosed with struvite crystals, s/he will need a prescription diet to dissolve them. These special diets can be fed for the rest of your cats life, or we may recommend transitioning to a quality diet under strict supervision with occasional urinalysis rechecks to make sure the crystals are not recurring.

Accumulation of crystals (especially in male cats) in the urethra can cause complete **obstruction** and inability to urinate. This causes dysfunction of both kidneys that, if not quickly corrected, will cause death within 24-36 hours. If your cat is obstructed, we will need to anesthetize him to clear the blockage and hospitalize him for several days to flush out his kidneys until they are functional again. If caught and treated quickly, most cats recover 100% with few complications. In rare instances, a cat may reblock numerous times. These cats usually require surgery to remove the penis and allow them to urinate through a hole in their urethra.

In cases of **recurring symptoms** with evidence of blood, we may recommend an X-ray to check for bladder and kidney stones, or an ultrasound to check for bladder abnormalities or tumors.

Unfortunately, in **most cases of FLUTD, a specific cause cannot be found**. Despite all of our advances in veterinary medicine, this problem remains a mystery. There is speculation that a virus is to blame for some, but to date, none have been isolated. Many cats suffer from occasional, recurrent symptoms that resolve on their own in 7-10 days with or without treatment. There is a similar syndrome in humans called idiopathic cystitis. Our approach to these cases is to rule out causes for which we have a treatment available (such as bacterial infections, crystals and stones), and to treat the discomfort. Remember, there is no "cure."

Also remember that inability of a cat to urinate is a **medical emergency** that requires immediate veterinary attention.

