

Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Urinary tract disorders can cause pain and difficulty in urination. In severe cases, male cats may become unable to urinate.

Lower urinary tract disease affects about 1 percent of the feline population. Not completely understood, the condition is sometimes called feline urologic syndrome or feline bladder disease.

Symptoms of LUTD include painful urination, difficulty urinating, increased frequency in urination and blood in the urine. Some cats may urinate outside the litterbox. This change in behavior is often the first symptom noticed by the owner, but it is often misinterpreted as intentional misconduct.

The most serious symptom of LUTD is the inability to urinate. This occurs in male cats when their longer, narrower urethras become blocked by the crystals and debris associated with LUTD. This situation is a medical emergency as urinary obstruction is fatal within 72 hours if untreated.

In most, but not all, cases of LUTD, sandlike mineral deposits are observed in the cat's urine. These deposits are usually made up of struvite, or magnesium ammonium phosphate. Once a cat develops LUTD, dietary changes are usually recommended. Struvite crystals require magnesium to form. Many low-magnesium diets are now available. Struvite also forms less easily in slightly acidic urine. Special diets formulated to help prevent LUTD produce an acidic urine.

While the causes of LUTD are not fully understood, veterinarians have been able to determine some risk factors. Cats of every age can develop this condition, but it is most commonly seen in cats between the ages of 2 and 6. Obese or inactive cats or those that drink little water are at higher risk.

If your cat has LUTD, feed only those diets recommended by your veterinarian. Most importantly, know the symptoms of this disease and seek prompt veterinary attention if you think your cat is affected.