

## When Cats Have Difficulty Urinating

### Some holistic ways to treat feline lower urinary tract disease.

By Lisa Hanks

Earlier this week, one of my Abyssinian cats, Hobbes, began to squat outside the litterbox, seeking soft surfaces such as rugs and clothes. After much straining, all that came out was a dribble with tiny spots of blood. Off to the veterinarian she went, where she was diagnosed with a feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD).

A FLUTD can result from various causes, such as a urinary tract infection (bacteria, viruses or fungi), or more complicated causes, such as parasites, cancerous tumors, trauma, bladder stones, urinary blockages and crystals.

“Some studies have shown cats might be more predisposed to FLUTDs when they’re older than 2 years, overweight and neutered,” says Robert Ferran, DVM, an International Veterinary Acupuncture Society-certified holistic veterinarian in Miami. “Stress is another factor. It can lead to issues like not drinking enough water or overeating.”

Symptoms might include straining, trying to urinate often or over long periods of time, producing little urine, urinating in unusual places (particularly smooth ones), vocalizing in the litterbox, and blood-tinged urine. Take your cat to your veterinarian immediately if you suspect a urinary problem.

FLUTDs can develop into more dangerous illnesses. Large amounts of crystals can make it difficult for the urine to make its way down the urethra, particularly in males, and eventually they form blockages and bladder stones, both of which can be life-threatening.

With such a wide range of symptoms and causes, veterinarians must customize each FLUTD treatment. The typical traditional treatment requires antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. Effective, natural remedies can complement traditional therapies.

“Fortunately, I’ve been able to treat and keep healthy quite a few cats with natural treatments alone,” Ferran says. “However, depending on the severity of the condition, I may combine conventional therapies, such as antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs, with natural ones.”

Natural FLUTD treatments stimulate the cat’s immune defenses and support kidney and bladder function. In addition to acupuncture, the holistic arsenal includes homeopathic remedies (such as cantharis and aconitum), nutraceuticals and herbs (such as the natural antibiotic, olive leaf extract). Ferran adds Bach flower essences.

“They address the emotional aspect, which can be a forerunner to physical ailments,” he says.

Many cats fight off one FLUTD after another.

“Natural remedies may help whatever weakness is making these cats prone to recurrent FLUTDs,” Ferran says. “The importance and power of natural remedies lie in their inherent ability to strengthen the immune system, which holds the key to opening and closing the door on sickness and disease.”

To prevent an FLUTD from occurring — or recurring — offer fresh water at all times. Encourage your cat to drink more by flavoring the water with canned tuna water. Feed a wet diet, whether canned, frozen or otherwise.

Look for a meat-based diet that maintains a proper urine pH level, which boosts urinary tract health and helps dissolve or prevent crystal formation. Ask your veterinarian to test your cat’s urine and to select the best food. Your cat also might benefit from eating two or more smaller meals a day.

In addition, try to reduce your cat’s stress, watch for odd behaviors (such as licking its genitals), take it in for an annual veterinary exam and clean your litterboxes at least daily.

“Pay attention while cleaning,” Ferran says. “Always make sure your cat is eliminating normally. If you see blood or something that doesn’t look right, bring it to your veterinarian’s attention.”

Lisa Hanks is a freelance writer based in Newport Beach, Calif. As she writes each day, her three cats rotate lap duties to



be sure she is never catless.