

Feline Diet Tested to Overcome Bladder Disorders

Michigan State University is researching a special diet to help dissolve bladder stones and prevent feline idiopathic cystitis.

Posted: March 15, 2010, 3 a.m. EST

Michigan State University researchers work with a cat at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Photo: Linda Chadderdon, courtesy MSU. Michigan State University researchers are testing a special diet for cats they hope will help the animals overcome bladder disorders affecting more than half a million felines each year.

The team from the College of Veterinary Medicine is hopeful the new diet will help cats dissolve certain bladder stones and prevent future occurrences, and prevent a disorder known as feline idiopathic cystitis, in which cats suffer from bladder inflammation.

John Kruger, a professor in the Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences, is leading the four separate clinical studies on a new commercial diet funded by a leading pet food manufacturer.

"The new diet is unique in that it is designed to help manage three common bladder disorders, which if left untreated can cause frequent painful urinations, house soiling and even urinary blockage and death," he said.

Specifically, Kruger and his team are looking at the effects the diet has on: Preventing feline idiopathic cystitis: This condition, the most common bladder disorder in cats, accounts for nearly two-thirds of all feline bladder disorders seen by MSU veterinarians, Kruger said. Unfortunately, there is no consistently effective treatment for management and prevention. While veterinarians often recommend diet changes, supplements and medicine, none of these have been shown to be effective by controlled clinical trials, he said. Dissolving struvite bladder stones without surgery and preventing them in the future. While these stones traditionally have been treated by surgical removal, some struvite stones may be dissolved using diet. Preventing calcium oxalate bladder stones: There is no diet as of yet that dissolves this type of stone, and removal by surgery — which can present complications — often is necessary.

The new diet minimizes the building blocks of bladder stones by controlling levels of calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and oxalate. It also has high levels of potassium citrate and vitamin B6 to interrupt stone formation, Kruger added, and it is high in antioxidants to moderate inflammation and reduce symptoms.

As part of the clinical trial, half of the felines will receive the new diet while half will receive a placebo diet formulated to represent the premium quality adult cat foods on the market. The diets look exactly the same, and as cats are enrolled into the study they are randomly assigned.

Enrollment began in June 2009 and continues through December 2010. The study covers all costs related to the diagnosis and monitoring of the cat's urinary disease and provides free food for up to two years. For more information, call (517) 432-9902.