

Factsheet 20 - Cystitis in cats

What is it? Cystitis means inflammation of the bladder, although other parts of the urinary system may be involved.

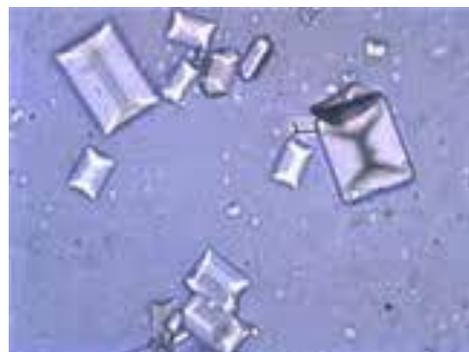
What are the signs? Cats usually strain to urinate. They may produce lots of little dribbles of bloody urine, often in strange locations (like inside the house, rather than using outdoors or their litter tray).



Quite often they can be either very aloof or yowl in pain as they try and empty their inflamed bladder. Over licking the belly or around the genitals can also be seen in chronic (long-term) cystitis cases.

Is it painful? Yes - it is certainly one of those times that if you suspect cystitis, a trip to the vet as soon as possible is a must. (If the bladder can't express urine due to a blockage (e.g. of crystals) - this can often be life threatening.)

What causes it? There are three main causes of cystitis; crystals, bacterial infection and 'idiopathic'. Idiopathic literally means that we don't know the exact cause - however stress is thought to be the main factor (especially in cats with recurrent cystitis). Idiopathic cystitis causes the majority of cystitis cases.



How can we tell what the cause is? A urine sample is usually the best place to start. However obtaining a sample can be tricky, due to the bladder being in spasm and not filling correctly (or as mentioned before, can't empty if it is 'blocked'). It is usual we need to make the cat feel more comfortable first before being able to get a sample. Once we get a sample, we use tests in-house to look for crystals and likelihood of a bacterial infection. We may well wish to carry out a blood sample if we feel that the cat is dehydrated or we have kidney concerns. If we aren't happy with the progress of a case then we need to consider X-Rays and ultrasound. These give us an idea of bladder wall thickness and if there are any stones or masses (which may require surgery).

What is the treatment? Depends on the cause! Pain killers are our first port of call for all cases. Antibacterial medication helps bacterial infections. Special prescription diets help with many kinds of crystals. Surgery may be needed for bladder stones. As for the idiopathic causes, then long-term control of stress is a necessity.



Is there any preventative action I can take?

All kinds of cystitis will be aided with trying to **increase water intake**. This is not as easy as it sounds for many cats! Finding out how your cat best likes to drink is very useful (sometimes running water seems to be enjoyed most - in which case, purchasing a 'water fountain' can literally be a life saver - other cats prefer still water in a silver bowl, or ceramic bowls filled right to the top etc.). Feeding a **wet (pouch)**

food rather than a dry (biscuit) food increases fluid intake can also be handy (provided your cat eats wet food, they can be very picky eaters!). **Obesity and not exercising** are also big factors - so get your cat to trim down and get moving!

How can you decrease stress in cats? There are a couple of really good ways. One is a plug-in diffuser that emits a cat pheromone (odourless to us mere human noses), which soothes their mental state. The other is medication to help them feel more settled (anxiolytics); we usually trial medication with no known side effects first, but some individuals need something else to ease their lives. Cats are inclined to be solitary, and unfortunately cystitis cases are far higher in houses with more than one cat. Providing multiple litter trays and feeding/drinking stations can drastically reduce anxiety. Sometimes rehoming your cat needs to be considered.



Case study.

6 yr old Frank (name changed to protect the innocent), had some bloody urine and was straining to pass it. He was brought to us and we found some crystals in his urine. We treated him with a prescription diet and painkillers and he improved. He then came back several months later with similar signs; however we couldn't find any crystals in his urine this time, but a bacterial infection was indicated this time. Frank had another lot of painkillers and some antibacterial medication. He did well... for a time.

Frank then had a further bout of cystitis. He lived in a multi-cat household and was perhaps a bit sedentary and we had asked the owners to help treat any additional stress. Frank's owners were fantastic; they had installed a Feliway plugin; been on calming medication; installed a new cat flap, and bought a water fountain that Frank drank readily from. And yet he was still having a problem.

We gave Frank an anaesthetic, took some X-Rays of his bladder and kidneys and carried out an ultrasound examination. We found multiple large stones, both in



his bladder and his kidneys (even though he didn't have any crystals in his urine, and he had been on a diet for some time to prevent the formation of these

stones). He then had an operation to remove the stones from his bladder. He was a lot happier after this and continues to do well. The stones in his kidneys are being closely monitored.

In conclusion, Frank possibly had a chronic problem with crystals that had not been picked up before we first saw him (he was a recent rescue cat). We managed to treat the crystals present, but the large stones meant that he was inclined to get a bacterial infection. We treated the bacterial infection, but the stones were obviously still there. During this time we treated him for stress, which probably helped. However removing the stones from his bladder has finally made him a very happy boy!