



## My cat has been diagnosed with urinary tract problems

### What is that?

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) is not a specific disease, but an overall term used to describe conditions that can affect the urinary bladder and/or urethra (the urinary outflow tract) of cats. Clinical signs for these disorders are all very similar so it is often difficult or impossible to determine the underlying cause without doing further investigations. Although many different diseases can affect the lower urinary tract, frustratingly a number of cats develop disease without any obvious underlying cause, this is commonly referred to as Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC).

### Investigations

In some patients at the time of first presentation we will treat symptomatically with medication to reduce discomfort, however usually we will want to look at a urine sample. This can sometimes be obtained at the clinic during the appointment and sometimes we will give you a collection kit to get a sample at home.

Looking at the urine sample can help us decide if there are crystals (mineral deposits that can sometimes lead to stone formation), high levels of inflammatory cells or a suspicion of bacterial infection (this is actually quite rare in cats). We also look at the concentration of the urine. If signs are severe or persistent, imaging of the urinary system is required.

This will typically start with an ultrasound scan but may include x-rays in some patients, especially if signs are less typical. We are particularly looking for bladder stones, debris or 'sand' in the bladder, changes in the bladder wall or occasionally bladder tumours.

In older cats blood testing is generally recommended to look for diseases that may be affecting the urinary or immune systems.

If there are no specific findings on any of these investigations it is most likely that your cat has Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC) and we will initiate a treatment plan based on this.

### What causes FIC?

It is unknown exactly what causes FIC however it is thought to be an abnormal inflammatory response to stress.

There are some known risk factors:

- Stress
- Inactivity
- Obesity
- Diet

## What can be done?

Although drug therapy can be helpful in some situations, this is not always a drug-responsive disease. It is important to concentrate on diet and the environment, recognising that these aspects have a crucial role to play.

Dietary modification for cats with urinary tract problems

Dietary changes can have 3 main effects:

- 1.Reducing urine concentration
- 2.Reducing mineral content of the urine (minimising crystal formation)
- 3.Anti-anxiety effects

Encouraging production of more dilute urine by changes in diet and increasing water intake (see below) helps reduce irritation in the lining of the bladder and reduces formation the formation of urinary crystals. Wet foods are always best however dry urinary diets are also formulated to encourage water intake.

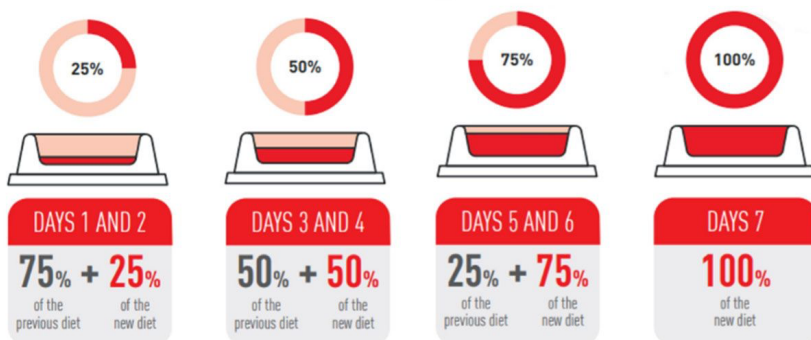
Urinary diets also have a careful mineral balance to reduce the formation of urinary crystals and bladder stones. Some diets can help dissolve bladder stones as well depending on the type.

Diets can also reduce anxiety by favouring the production of calming neurotransmitters in the brain. Royal Canin Calm diet is very good for cats where stress is the major factor. Hills C/D stress has a combination of urinary and anti-anxiety properties.

Cats will often develop a strong preference for particular diets, and this means changing cats to a new diet can sometimes be difficult.

These tips may help:

- Always make a gradual change in diet – over a minimum of several days or over a few weeks if your cat is quite fussy.
- Start by mixing a very small amount of the new food with your cat's old food, and make sure it is well mixed; then gradually increase as below:



## Increasing water intake

Increasing water intake has been shown to have the greatest impact on feline idiopathic cystitis. The most effective way of doing this is to feed wet food (tins or pouches).

Other ways to help increase water intake include:

- Offering water from different bowls in several locations; ceramic bowls are often preferred to metal or plastic, which can leave an unpleasant odour or taste.
- Shallow bowls are better than deep-sided bowls so that the cat can see their surroundings while drinking and their whiskers do not brush against the sides of the bowl
- Use water fountains as many cats like moving water
- Using water flavoured with chicken stock - make sure it is low in sodium
- Adding further water to the food (if tolerated without affecting the appetite)
- Avoid noisy places or anywhere close to a litter box.
- Catching rainwater from outside as cats often prefer this to tap water
- Avoid having water and food next to each other.

A product that can help to increase water intake is Pro Plan feline Hydracare. A supplement that will help increase the intake of liquid, reduce your cats specific gravity and is very palatable.



## Environmental modification

Stress plays a very important role in triggering FIC and modifying the environment will help reduce stress.

It is important to identify and reduce any specific stress triggers. These include other pets, especially cats, building works, owner stress, or changes to the people in the house.

The single most common cause of stress in cases of FIC is probably conflict with another cat in the household. This may be difficult to detect, but should always be suspected in a cat with FIC. Always feed cats in separate areas or have multiple bowls of food to avoid competition and forced close contact. Cats outside the household may also be a source of stress. Using a microchip cat flap is recommended so as to prevent other cats entering the house without your knowledge.

Make sure your cat has every opportunity to urinate frequently. Ensure there is one more litter box than the number of cats in the house. Put litter boxes in different locations and consider trying different types of litter in the box. Avoid putting the litter box in noisy or busy areas.

Cats that spend a large amount of time indoors are also susceptible to stress. Domestic cats often live in exceptionally confined spaces with little to really occupy their time and their minds - this lack of 'environmental enrichment' can cause significant stress.

Simple measures may help, such as:

- Spending time playing with the cat on a regular basis – setting aside time each day and using new and different toys
- Feeding with activity feeders or toys increases natural hunting behaviour
- Allowing the cat some outdoor access, even in an enclosed run if necessary, can provide interest and stimulation
- Scratching posts, and resting places for the cat. Cats need space, and need to be able to control their environment, at least to some extent.
- It is important that they can explore their environment and have hiding places - ideally in elevated locations e.g. on top of furniture or cupboards.

The 'indoor cat initiative' website (<https://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats>) has some very helpful tips (useful for cats that go outside as well).

Over the counter products that can be a useful tool



Synthetic feline facial pheromone Feliway – The special scent (odourless to people and other animals) that Feliway utilises is a replication of the pheromone that cats leave naturally when they are feeling comfortable in their environment. This comes either as a spray or as a plug-in diffuser.

Calmex – A calming supplement to help manage stress and anxiety. Calmex is fast acting and consists of a specially blended formula to help promote relaxed behaviour in cats experiencing behavioural problems. It provides a unique blend of amino acids, B vitamins and Theanine.

Calm food – as mentioned previously Royal Canin calm food is very good at reducing anxiety.

Proplan Calming care probiotic anxiety supplement – Contains a strain of beneficial bacteria shown to help cats maintain calm behaviour. Helps blunt cortisol a marker of stress.

For further information please talk to one of our vets.

More information can also be found on the International Cat Care website:

<https://icatcare.org/advice/making-your-home-cat-friendly>

<https://icatcare.org/advice/cat-health/feline-idiopathic-cystitis-fic>