

Feline Idiopathic Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Basics

OVERVIEW

- “Idiopathic” refers to a disease of unknown cause; the “lower urinary tract” refers to the bladder and urethra (the tube from the bladder to the outside, through which urine flows out of the body)
- “Feline idiopathic lower urinary tract disease” is a general term for disorders of domestic cats characterized by blood in the urine (known as “hematuria”); difficult or painful urination (known as “dysuria”); abnormal, frequent passage of urine (known as “pollakiuria”); urinating in inappropriate locations (known as “periuria”), such as in a bath tub; and partial or complete blockage of the urethra (known as “urethral obstruction”)
- Varying combinations of these signs may be associated with any cause of feline lower urinary tract disease (also known as FLUTD)
- Similarity of clinical signs with diverse causes is not surprising, since the feline urinary tract responds to various diseases in a limited and predictable fashion
- Idiopathic feline lower urinary tract disease and inflammation of the bladder for unknown reasons (known as “feline idiopathic cystitis”; also known as FIC) are diagnoses that are established only after known causes (such as kidney stones or urinary tract infection) of the described signs of urinary tract disease have been eliminated
- The incidence of blood in the urine (hematuria), difficult or painful urination (dysuria), and/or blockage of the urethra (urethral obstruction) in domestic cats in the United States and Great Britain previously has been reported to be approximately 0.5–1.0% per year



SIGNALMENT/DESCRIPTION OF PET

Species

- Cat

Mean Age and Range

- May occur at any age, but is recognized most commonly in young to middle-aged adults (mean age, 3.5 years)
- Uncommon in cats less than 1 year of age and in cats greater than 10 years of age

Predominant Sex

- Male and female

SIGNS/OBSERVED CHANGES IN THE PET

- Difficult or painful urination (dysuria)
- Blood in the urine (hematuria)
- Abnormal, frequent passage of urine (pollakiuria)
- Urinating in inappropriate locations (periuria)
- Blockage of urine flow through the urethra to outside the body (known as “outflow obstruction”)
- Thickened, firm, contracted bladder wall felt by the veterinarian during physical examination
- Some cats with lower urinary tract diseases exhibit findings similar to those observed in people with interstitial cystitis

CAUSES

- By definition, this is “idiopathic” disease for which the cause is unknown. Many possible causes have been suggested, such as the following:
- Noninfectious diseases, including idiopathic cystitis (inflammation of the bladder of unknown cause)
- Viruses implicated—calicivirus, feline syncytia-forming virus, and a gamma herpesvirus (bovine herpesvirus 4) have been suggested as potential causes in some cats
- Initial episodes of idiopathic lower urinary tract diseases usually occur in the absence of a significant number of detectable bacteria and white blood cells in the urine (when present, known as “pyuria”); studies of male and female cats with and without blockage of the urethra (urethral obstruction) found bacterial urinary tract infections in less than 3% of young to middle-age adults and approximately 10% of senior cats

RISK FACTORS

- Stress—may play a role in causing signs or in making the signs worse; unlikely to be a primary cause of FLUTD

Treatment

HEALTH CARE

- Pets *without* blockage of the urethra (non-obstructive lower urinary tract diseases)—typically managed as outpatients; diagnostic evaluation may require brief hospitalization
- Pets *with* blockage of the urethra (obstructive lower urinary tract diseases)—usually hospitalized for diagnosis and management

DIET

- Appropriate dietary management recommended for cats with persistent presence of crystals in the urine (known as “crystalluria”) associated with plugs in the urethra, causing blockage of the urethra (urethral obstruction)
- Observations suggest that feeding moist rather than dry foods may minimize recurrence of signs; the goals are to promote flushing action of the bladder and urethra by increasing urine volume and to dilute concentrations of toxins, chemical irritants, and substances that lead to inflammation (known as “inflammatory mediators”), and components needed to produce urinary tract stones (stones are known as “uroliths”)

SURGERY

- Surgical opening of the urethra (known as “perineal urethrostomy”) to minimize recurrent blockage of the urethra (urethral obstruction) will be considered when the obstructive disease is localized to the area of the urethra within the penis (known as the “penile urethra”) by contrast x-rays (radiographs) of the urethra

Medications

Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered as all inclusive

- Tolterodine may be considered to minimize hyperactivity of the bladder muscle and urge incontinence or the need to urinate frequently; further studies are required
- Amitriptyline, a tricyclic antidepressant (TCA) and anti-anxiety drug—has been suggested as a treatment for cats

with severe recurrent or persistent signs

- Butorphanol, buprenorphine, and fentanyl—have been suggested for short-term pain relief (known as “analgesia”) in cats with inflammation of the bladder for unknown reasons (idiopathic cystitis)
- Phenoxybenzamine—may be used to minimize muscular spasm in the urethra and thus minimize blockage of urine flow related to muscle spasm
- Prazosin— may be used to minimize muscular spasm in the urethra and thus minimize blockage of urine flow related to muscle spasm
- A number of other therapies have been suggested on an empirical basis including pentosan polysulfated sodium, glucosamine +/- chondroitin sulfate, steroids, NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories), dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), antibiotics, methenamine

Follow-Up Care

PATIENT MONITORING

- Monitor blood in the urine (hematuria) by urinalysis; tapping the bladder (known as “cystocentesis”) to obtain a urine sample may introduce blood into the urine (known as “iatrogenic hematuria”), so collecting a urine sample from naturally voided urine is preferred

PREVENTIONS AND AVOIDANCE

- Observations suggest that feeding moist rather than dry foods may minimize recurrence of signs
- Reduce environmental stress

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Use of catheters placed into the urethra and bladder to allow drainage of urine from the bladder (known as “indwelling transurethral catheters”)—often cause trauma; may lead to bacterial urinary tract infections, because the catheter provides a pathway for bacteria to move up the urethra and into the bladder (and possibly to the kidneys)
- Surgical opening of the urethra (perineal urethrostomy)—may allow increased likelihood of bacterial urinary tract infections; post-operative scarring may lead to narrowing of the urethra (known as “urethral stricture”)

EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- Blood in the urine (hematuria), difficult or painful urination (dysuria), and abnormal frequent passage of urine (pollakiuria) often are self-limiting in pets with most idiopathic lower urinary tract diseases; signs generally subside within 4–7 days
- Signs often recur unpredictably; frequency of recurrence appears to decline with advancing age

Key Points

- Blood in the urine (hematuria), difficult or painful urination (dysuria), and abnormal frequent passage of urine (pollakiuria) often are self-limiting in pets with most idiopathic lower urinary tract diseases; signs generally subside within 4–7 days
- Signs often recur unpredictably; frequency of recurrence appears to decline with advancing age
- FLUTD generally is treated symptomatically; few controlled scientific studies demonstrate effectiveness of most drugs used
- Male cats should be monitored for signs of blockage of the urethra (urethral obstruction)
- Reduce environmental stress by minimizing impact of changes in the home and maintaining a constant diet; environmental enrichment for indoor-housed cats consists of providing necessary resources (such as food, water, litter boxes, space, play), providing a safe place to hide, refinement of cat-owner interactions, and management of conflict
- Provide proper litter-box hygiene