

THE FINICKY CAT

Diet Can Help Cats with Urinary Problems

BY ARDEN MOORE

You could be a genuine lifesaver to your cat just by paying attention to his bathroom habits as well as how much water he drinks. Felines of all ages and breeds can develop a host of urinary issues ranging from irritating bladder infections to painful kidney stones to potentially lethal urethral obstructions.

If your cat switches from being mellow to irritable, makes lots of trips to the litter box, suddenly starts urinating on the floor, shows signs of pain or difficulty urinating or gets into the strange habit of overgrooming his genital area, he may be showing signs of a urinary condition that needs veterinary attention.

Why some cats develop urinary issues and others don't remains one of the major unsolved mysteries in veterinary medicine. In fact, your veterinarian may refer to your cat's unexplained bladder infection as feline idiopathic cystitis; the key word in this diagnosis is "idiopathic," which means unknown cause. Or your veterinarian may say your cat has FLUTD, an umbrella term for many conditions affecting your cat's urethra or bladder. Spelled out, it's known as feline lower urinary tract disease.

What role does nutrition play in minimizing your cat's risk for urinary issues — and for treating diagnosed conditions? For answers, *Catster* turned to Joseph Bartges, D.V.M., Ph.D., professor and board-certified nutritionist and internal medicine specialist at the University of Georgia's College of Veterinary Medicine in Athens.

What's the connection between water consumption and urinary health?

It is a very important connection. Some studies show that increasing water intake and, therefore, increasing urine volume decreases the concentrations of minerals that may result in stone disease. Many cats will drink water that is moving — that's why they like to drink out of faucets.



Does it matter if I feed my cat dry food versus canned food?

Canned foods are typically around 75 percent moisture, while dry foods are typically around 10 percent moisture. Theoretically, cats will take in more water with a canned food than a dry food, and this may help with urinary disease. But there is more opinion than fact about this topic.

What are the most common urinary issues facing cats?

The condition depends on the age of the cat. In young adult to middle-aged cats, the most common urinary health issues are stones and idiopathic cystitis. In older cats, stones and kidney disease are more common. In younger cats, struvite bladder stones occur more commonly, while in older cats, calcium oxalate stones occur more commonly. Why these occur is less understood.

What dietary recommendations can you offer for cats diagnosed with urinary issues?

Depending on the issue, the cat needs more water and decreased amounts of minerals that form crystals and/or stones. Decreasing the stress response with dietary fish oil and antioxidants also has been shown to help.

Many over-the-counter diets for cats carry a “urinary health” claim, which specifically refers to struvite (bladder) stones. They tend to induce an acidic pH and are lower in magnesium. More specific diets are therapeutic diets that are formulated to decrease the risk of both struvite and calcium oxalate stones. These include Hill’s Prescription Diet c/d, Purina UR, Royal Canin s/o and Blue Buffalo WU.

Curious about your cat’s eating and drinking habits? Dash your feline food-related questions to *Catster* magazine feline nutrition columnist Arden Moore, who will dish out advice about healthy eating habits for your feline. Email your questions today to arden@fourleggedlife.com.

How can therapeutic diets aid in dissolving struvite stones in cats?

Basically, struvite stones dissolve in cats within two to four weeks of being on these therapeutic diets. They dissolve in a fashion similar to ice cubes in water — from the outside layers to the inside.

By changing the urine composition, the minerals in the stone are released from the outer layer of the stone back into the urine and then are urinated out. Unfortunately, we have not found a way yet to dissolve calcium oxalate stones (that require surgical removal).



Arden Moore is a pet behavior consultant, author and master pet first aid instructor

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Drink up, kitty!

Arnold Plotnick, D.V.M., DACVIM, medical director at Manhattan Cat Specialists clinic in New York City, shares these tips to get cats to drink more water and, therefore, minimize their risk for urinary issues:

→ **Switch from the traditional water bowl** to a fountain-type water bowl. Often fascinated by flowing water, cats will usually drink more if the bowl contains moving water.

→ **Put additional water bowls** in unconventional places. Cats are naturally curious, and if they stumble upon an additional water bowl where they don’t expect it, such as in the corner of the bedroom or on a ledge where they sleep or hang out, they’re likely to increase their water intake.

→ **Don’t just refill** — replace. When the water level in your cat’s bowl decreases, don’t just add more water to it. Dump out the old water, clean the bowl, and replace it with fresh water, preferably chilled, from a bottle kept in the refrigerator, instead of from the faucet.

