



**Birchwood
Animal Hospital**

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Birchwood Animal Hospital

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Guide to Feline Idiopathic Cystitis

What is Feline Idiopathic Cystitis?

Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC) is a non-infectious disorder resulting in painful inflammation of the urinary bladder. Symptoms often appear suddenly and can wax and wane, and may develop into a chronic condition. Cats with FIC are able to urinate but it is often painful and there may be an increased urge associated with the inflammation. As a result, cats may urinate outside the litter box, urinate more frequently and strain to urinate. Blood may be passed in the urine and the cat may groom the lower abdominal/genital area more often than usual.

The exact cause of FIC is unknown, but it is likely that several factors contribute to the development of this condition. Male and female cats are both equally affected. Middle-aged cats (2-10 years) are most commonly affected. Greater than 60% of cats brought to veterinarians for lower urinary tract disease have FIC. Factors that play a role in the disease process include stress, obesity, indoor living and genetics. Treatment for FIC therefore targets some of these factors.

How is FIC diagnosed?

Your veterinarian reaches a diagnosis of FIC based on the clinical signs the cat is showing and by ruling out other diseases affecting the lower urinary tract such as urinary tract infections, partial urinary obstructions, urinary stones and hormonal conditions (diabetes, hyperthyroidism). Ruling out these other conditions involves blood work, urinalysis and sometimes x-rays or imaging studies.

Treatments

Of the many treatments available for FIC, the only two that have proven to make a significant difference in the long term course of the disease are changes in diet and environmental enrichment. For management of an acute flare up of symptoms there are a few options. Many episodes will resolve on their own in 5 – 10 days especially if it is the first such episode. Your veterinarian may prescribe a pain medication or anti-inflammatory to make your cat more comfortable until the episode passes. Once the acute episode has been addressed the focus of treatment changes to long term management. This is where diet and environmental enrichment are important.

What exactly is environmental enrichment? The aim is to reduce or eliminate sources of stress for your cat. This is perhaps the most important aspect of managing FIC. Studies have shown affected cats that have environmental enrichment as part of their treatment go from showing signs of FIC on a weekly basis to showing no significant signs at the end of 10 months. It should be noted that it takes some time and patience in order to make environmental enrichment work for an individual cat.

So how can you implement environmental enrichment for your cat?

Litter boxes:

- Have at least one litter box for each cat plus one additional box. Position

boxes in different areas rather than side by side. Cats perceive side by side boxes as one larger box.

- Position the box so it has at least two exit points. Avoid dead ends.
- Place litter boxes in quiet, low traffic areas of the home.
- Have at least one litter box on each floor of a multi-level home.
- Use deep granular litter. Clay and clumping litters are favorites for cats.
- Clean the box at least once a day. Change the litter once a week. Wash the box once a month and replace the litter box once per year.
- Look for the largest litter box you can find at the store.

Safe spots around the house:

- Hiding spots and opportunities for the cat to express their natural predatory behaviour are important. This means providing climbing posts, scratching posts, toys that can be chased and caught. Window boxes or perches are highly recommended as height is important and may be perceived as a safe spot by your cat.



Social Interactions:

- In a multi-cat household, a dominant cat may need to wear a bell on its collar so that the more submissive cat can hear it coming. For single cat households, management of separation anxiety is a consideration. Interactive toys may be helpful for managing boredom in a single cat home. Cats also benefit from one on one interactions with their owners. Try to schedule in some play time daily and rotate which toys you use to keep your cat interested.



For more information on enriching your cat's environment please refer to the "Indoor Pet Initiative" from the Ohio State School of Veterinary Medicine. [Http://indoorpet.osu.edu/](http://indoorpet.osu.edu/)

Diet Change and Increasing Water Intake

Increasing water intake can dilute the irritating substances in the urine. Studies have shown that feeding a canned wet diet that maintains the pH of the urine at between 6 – 6.5 results in improvement in signs related to FIC when compared with feeding a dry food only diet. For this reason your veterinarian may recommend a diet formulated specially for cats with lower urinary tract disease.

New foods should be introduced gradually. Transitioning from the old food to the new food can take from 7 days to 3 or 4 weeks. You may begin by either mixing small amounts of the new food in with the old food and slowly increasing the amount of the new food. Alternatively, you may offer the new food beside the old food in a separate dish.