



Western Hills Animal Hospital

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Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease / Idiopathic Sterile Cystitis

This disease entity goes by many different names to coincide with the many hypothesized causes of it. Today, after more than 50 years of research, the cause is still not clear and there is no known definitive treatment. The current name for this condition is Idiopathic Sterile Cystitis, (ISC), but that will most likely change in time.

The leading present day theory for ISC is that some level of stress in the cat's life has an effect on the bladder, and is made worse when concentrated urine is retained in the cat's bladder. Leading research is looking at some measure of a neuroendocrine abnormality in the affected cat that decreases its ability to compensate and adjust to stress. This leads to inflammation of the bladder lining and the subsequent accumulation of blood and protein-mucous debris in the bladder. While there may be some crystals present it is not felt that they play a major role in the disease. Although in large numbers they may complicate ISC. Bacterial infection is also not a common component of this disease entity but can be a complication in relatively rare cases. Treatment of ISC is multi-factorial and mostly a management issue.

The first area of treatment we want to address is decreasing the length of time the concentrated urine stays in the bladder. We need to encourage your cat to frequently use the litter boxes. As a rule of thumb the minimum number of litter boxes should be the number of cats in the household plus one. If you have 1 cat then you need at least 2 litter boxes, 2 cats and you need 3 boxes, etc. You want the boxes as large as possible so the cat is comfortable using them, at least big enough for your cat to stand in with all 4 legs and be able to turn around. Placement of the litter boxes is important. They should be in your cat's high traffic areas but away from distractions such as appliances, heating/cooling vents, door bells and such. They should be in rooms that never get closed off from your pet. Most cats prefer open litter boxes but some like a closed litter box. Go with the type they prefer. Type of litter is very important. Most prefer a fine grain, sand-like non scented litter such as the scoopable litters as opposed to the larger sized clay based litters. It is a good idea not to have air fresheners around the litter boxes. Once you find a brand of litter your cat likes stick with it, change stresses your cat. Cats are very fastidious. They prefer clean litter boxes. The boxes should be cleaned daily and scrubbed out with a mild detergent weekly. Replace the boxes with new ones on an annual basis as plastic tends to absorb the urine smell.

Next area we need to address is diluting the urine. This will also help in getting your cat to urinate more frequently. We accomplish this by increasing the fluid intake of your cat, when cats are normally not big drinkers. Go to an all canned diet, preferably a chicken or rabbit based diet. Male cats should be on a canned urine acidifying protein restricted diet

such as Hills C/D or Royal Canin's SO diet because of the potential life threatening risk of struvite-mucous plug urethral obstructions. Adding chicken broth, clam juice, tuna or salmon juice to their food as well as their water is another way of increasing their fluid intake. Adding a drinking/water fountain or leaving the faucet on will help too. Providing a bowl of lactose free milk is yet another way to increase fluid intake. If your cat has a bad case of ISC and stops using the litter boxes you may need to try a different type of litter to get them back into the litter box. A good way to do this is to add a second litter box next to the existing ones with the new litter in it; let your cat choose which they prefer.

Probably the most important factor in ISC is stress. A very good website with great information on this is: www.Indoorcat.org/Resources.php. This website is from the Ohio State School of Veterinary Medicine and is a great information source for all cat owners. Some things to help lower your cats stress is to incorporate one on one playtime with each of your cats on a daily basis. Provide them with places they can go for quiet alone time away from you and other household pets, such as climbing trees, high book shelves and platforms/cots on window sills for them to lounge on. Minimize change in their life/environment, such as staying with their same diet (unless needed for health issues or food aversions) and same litter unless they develop litter aversions. Don't move their litter boxes, climbing trees, food and water dishes around, etc.

Last is medical management of ISC. It is last for a reason. For, at least long term management, it is the least important in preventing recurrences. Initially pain management is important in the acute stages as this is a painful condition. Antibiotics may be needed in select cases. Antispasmodic and appetite stimulants may be needed and will be used on a case by case situation as well as subcutaneous/IV fluid therapy. For the blocked male cat life threatening issues will require intensive hospitalization. Initial lab work will consist of urinalysis, possible radiographs, urine cultures, and blood work-ups.

To sum it all up: there are many factors to Idiopathic Sterile Cystitis, some of which we still do not understand. There is no one treatment that works in all cases. Canned/moistened diets are extremely important as well as other ways of increasing fluid intake. Minimizing your pet's stress may be difficult to assess but it is also extremely important. Check out O.S.U.'s website for helpful hints.