

Urethral Obstruction in Cats

My Cat is Constipated!... are you sure? You may be missing a genuine emergency!!

A cat's repeated efforts to urinate are often mistaken for constipation. Whilst thankfully not too common, urethral blockage is a painful emergency. Failure to seek prompt attention can result in kidney failure and death.

Urethral obstruction is something that occurs almost exclusively in male cats. The urethra in a male cat is longer and narrower than that in a female cat, and so is more susceptible to becoming blocked.



- A 'plug' of 'debris' in the urethra - this is usually an accumulation of proteins, cells, crystals and debris in the bladder that accumulates and lodges in the urethra
- A small stone or an accumulation of very small stones that form in the bladder may become lodged in the urethra
- Swelling and spasm of the urethra - during inflammation of the bladder and urethra

How it is treated?

A vet will need to relieve the obstruction quickly, usually under anaesthetic or heavy sedation. Often a catheter needs to be passed into the urethra (via the penis). Fluids may be used via the catheter to flush out the obstruction and wash out any blood and debris. If the obstruction is caused by spasm of the urethral muscle, simply sedating or anaesthetising the cat may be sufficient to allow easy passage of a catheter into the bladder. Commonly blood, urine tests, x rays or an ultrasound may be performed in order to check kidney function to find the underlying cause of the obstruction and to help determine the most appropriate treatment plan.

Sometimes catheters are left in place for a few days to ensure urine can be produced while treatment is commenced for the underlying disease and inflammation. Further treatment depends on the underlying cause of the obstruction, the severity of the obstruction, and what (if any) complications have arisen. Any damage to the kidneys may be completely reversible, but cats will often have to receive intravenous fluids (a drip) if the kidneys have been affected.

Long-term management

Preventing further occurrences will depend on the underlying cause of the obstruction. Once the cause has been determined, the best long term management can be discussed. Options can include dietary changes, encouraging an increase in fluid uptake, stress relief and in some cases, surgery may be considered (a Perineal Urethrostomy helps to open and widen the narrow end to the urethra).

Contact us immediately if you think your cat may have an obstructed urethra, it should be treated as an emergency.

