



# HOW TO PREVENT URINARY TRACT PROBLEMS IN CATS

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## THE ISSUE

Urinary tract disease is a common ailment that affects many cats at some time during their life. An occasional urinary tract infection can be treated by your veterinarian and is unlikely to have long-term negative consequences. But untreated or frequent urinary tract infections may lead to renal (kidney) failure later in your cat's life. Increasingly, veterinary research is coalescing around the idea that the frequency of urinary tract disease in modern cats can be reduced by bringing cats' diets more closely in line with the diets their ancestors used to eat: more moisture, more meat, higher quality meat and fewer carbs.<sup>1</sup> This solution sheet outlines several things owners can do to reduce the likelihood that a cat will need to be treated for urinary tract disease later in life. However, if your cat has ever been diagnosed with urinary tract disease, don't use this solution sheet—instead, use our *How to Prevent the Recurrence of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease*.

## WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD) has the potential to progress into life-threatening blockages that may require emergency surgery. See your veterinarian immediately if: you think your cat may be suffering from FLUTD, your cat is not producing urine, he strains or cries when urinating, his urine volume becomes significantly less, there is blood in his urine or your cat otherwise appears to become ill. This solution sheet can help owners prevent urinary tract problems in cats that have never been diagnosed with FLUTD, but **diagnosis and initial treatment of FLUTD must be provided by a veterinarian.**

## THE SOLUTION

We've provided a variety of approaches and starred (\*) the ones we think will accomplish the most for most cats.

### **1 \*Transition your cat to a moisture-rich, meat-rich, lower carb diet**

- **If your cat is eating only kibble**, begin by fully transitioning her to wet food. (See our *How to Transition Cats to Wet Foods*.) Then seek to transition her from wet food to raw food.
- **If your cat is eating a mix of kibble and wet or raw food**, begin by gradually reducing the amount of kibble and increasing the amount of wet or raw food. Make the transition to a totally wet or raw diet slowly over the course of a month.
- **If your cat is eating only wet food**, try to transition her to raw foods. (See our *How to Feed Your Cat Freeze-dried and Dehydrated Food* and our *How to Feed Your Cat Frozen Raw Food*.)
- **If your cat refuses anything but kibble**, try adding water to her dry food. Begin with a small amount and gradually increase the amount of water with each meal to 1 to 1½ cups of water per half cup of kibble (or as much as your cat will tolerate without reducing her food intake).

**2 \*Water, water, water** The most natural and effective way to increase your cat's total intake of moisture is to increase the moisture content of his food from around 10% (kibble) to around 70% (canned, raw frozen, rehydrated and cat's natural diet of small prey.) But it also makes sense to encourage cats to drink more water.

- **\*Change water daily.** Cats are more likely to drink water that smells and tastes fresh.
- **\*Multiple sources.** Provide several water choices in different places. No water near litter boxes.

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<sup>1</sup> Planting EA, Bosch G, Hendriks WH. Estimation of the dietary nutrient profile of free-roaming feral cats: possible implications for nutrition of domestic cats. *Br J Nutr*. 2011 October; 106:S35–S48. Markwell PJ, Buffington CT, Smith BH. The effect of diet on lower urinary tract disease in cats. *J. Nutr* 1998 December; 128(12 Suppl). Jones BR, Sanson RL, Morris RS. Elucidating the risk factors of feline lower urinary tract disease. *NZ Vet J* June 1997 June;45(3):100-8. Hodgkins EM. *Your Cat*. 1st ed: 167-176; 211-228; 2007.

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- **Make it move.** Cats are attracted to running water, and some are more likely to drink water that moves. Cat fountains are less wasteful than leaving a tap running.
- **Make it taste good.** Some cats drink more when their water tastes better. Switching to bottled or filtered water may increase consumption and so may adding low sodium broth from chicken, tuna, clams or sardines. At least one water dish should be plain water.

### **3 \*Make litter boxes more inviting**

Avoiding situations that discourage cats from peeing can help head off urinary tract problems. Most cats prefer a clean litter box. To ensure your cat never hesitates, provide at least two litter boxes; put them in different places and clean them once or twice daily. Most cats like to pee where they feel quiet and safe. Experiment with location and with open and covered boxes to find the pee situation your cat prefers. To prevent a situation where your cat dislikes all of his litter box choices (and chooses to pee outside his box), always keep your cat's top choice available—then test alternative boxes and locations against his favorite.

### **4 Reduce stress**

Your cat may show signs of stress including: hiding, aggression, inappropriate urination or chronic vomiting, but cats may be under stress without showing these signs. If you think your cat may be experiencing stress, see our *Reducing Stress in Cats*.

### **5 Improve urinary tract health**

Herbal supplements may help increase blood flow to the kidneys, reduce bladder inflammation and increase urination frequency and volume. Glucosamine can improve bladder wall health, a particularly useful tactic for cats that have been diagnosed with Idiopathic Cystitis and have been found to have blood in their bladders. Some products combine herbal supplements with glucosamine.

## **RESULTS**

In the short term, increasing your cat's moisture intake should result in more urine in his litter box. Look for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of urine per day for a 10 lb. cat. In the long term, these approaches should improve the health of your cat's urinary system and make it less likely that he'll develop urinary issues that require veterinary care.

## **STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Mud Bay staffers are specially trained to help owners prevent urinary tract problems in cats. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendations on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.