Feline Idiopathic Cystitis

**What is it?**
Cystitis means inflammation of the bladder. Idiopathic means that the cause is unknown. While bacterial infections of the urinary tract in people and dogs are quite common, these infections are uncommon in cats. Bladder stones can cause irritation in cats, but the majority of cystitis cases in cats have no known cause. It is thought that there are simply some cats that are predisposed to developing cystitis when in a particular environment.

**How do I know if my cat has idiopathic cystitis?**
Signs of bladder irritation include: straining to urinate, urinating smaller volumes more frequently, urinating in inappropriate places, and blood in the urine. Your vet may perform some of the following tests.
1. A urinalysis is a urine test and will often show red blood cells, very concentrated urine, and occasionally crystals.
2. A bacterial culture of the urine may be done to rule out infection.
3. X-rays of the bladder may be taken to rule out the presence of bladder stones.
4. Blood may be drawn to investigate other possible health problems.

**Are there any serious complications I should know about?**
Male cats have more narrow urethras (the tube that carries urine out of the body) than female cats. Inflammation and crystals can obstruct the urethra in male cats leading to a partial or complete blockage. Signs that a male cat is “blocked” are:
- straining in the litter box
- crying while in litter box
- painful abdomen
- depression
A male cat that is “blocked” for too long can develop irreversible kidney damage, which is fatal; therefore, it is very important to contact your veterinarian if you believe your cat is not urinating. Your veterinarian can examine your cat, and if his urethra is blocked, can remove the obstruction while your cat is sedated. Your cat may need to stay in the hospital until he can urinate freely on his own. Some cats will require IV fluids during their recovery. There is a surgery available for male cats that become “blocked” multiple times.

**How do I treat idiopathic cystitis?**
Idiopathic cystitis is a very frustrating condition because there is no definite cure. There are, however, numerous things that can be done to control the number and severity of flare-ups. The most important thing to do is to make the urine as dilute as possible. This means increasing the amount of liquid your cat consumes. By creating more dilute urine, the minerals and toxins in the urine will be less concentrated and, therefore, less irritating to the bladder.
It is also beneficial to make your cat’s environment as stress-free as possible. There is a correlation between flare-ups and stressful events such as moving, introduction of new pets or family members, and owners going on vacation. If you anticipate any such events, your veterinarian can help with suggestions on how to minimize stress and anxiety. Also, The Ohio State University has a very helpful website for this issue:

http://www.vet.ohio-state.edu/indoorcat.htm

Ways to increase water consumption:
- **Switch to a canned food diet.**
- Add water to your cat’s food, be it dry or canned.
- Keep fresh water near your cat’s food. Some cats prefer a shallow dish filled to the top. Others prefer to reach down into a bowl to drink. You can experiment to see which your cat prefers.
- Add wet treats to your cat’s diet, such as water packed tuna, clam juice, or low sodium gravy.
- Offer distilled or bottled water.
- Leave some water in the bottom of your bathtub or sink. You can place a shallow bowl under a slow drip to ensure the water is always fresh.
- Try a pet water fountain, so your cat has constant running water.
- Make ice cubes out of meat or fish broth. Place an ice cube in a bowl of water to lightly flavor the water throughout the day. Always offer unflavored water as well.

Are there any medications that can help?
Your veterinarian may prescribe one or more of these medications, depending on your cat’s history.
- **Pain Medication:** During flare-ups we can manage the pain and irritation of the bladder with different pain medications. This should increase your cat’s level of comfort.
- **Anti-anxiety medication:** Some cats can benefit from medications to reduce their level of stress and anxiety.
- **Feliway:** This is a synthetic feline facial pheromone that sends cats a scent signal that they are in a safe environment. This can be very helpful for cats that tend to be nervous or stressed. This can be purchased from your veterinarian and comes as a spray or a room diffuser.

What is the long-term prognosis for my cat?
Feline idiopathic cystitis is a very common problem in our cat population and can be frustrating for owners. It is important to know that the problem may resolve over time or may be life-long, with flare-ups and other periods of more normal behavior. By
working with your veterinarian, you can manage this condition to lessen the frequency and severity of flare-ups so that you and your cat can live more comfortably.

*Helpful Websites:*
  - catinfo.org
  - indoorpet.osu.edu