

DOCTOR, WHY IS MY CAT URINATING OUTSIDE OF THE LITTER BOX?

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This is a question I get asked nearly daily, and often multiple times in a day; unfortunately, the answer is not so simple. The most common assumptions by the average owner are either that their cat is doing this because of a behavioral problem or that they are having difficulties with a Urinary Tract Infection (**UTI**). However, cats have several natural defenses against **UTIs**, thus making **UTIs** actually a less common complaint than you might think. The more likely reason for such an issue is a condition we now call **Feline Interstitial Cystitis (FIC)**.

FIC is a complicated disease and often difficult to understand. Cystitis is a general term referring to inflammation in the urinary bladder. The term cystitis does NOT imply any specific underlying cause. Typical signs of a cat with **FIC** are:

- Increased attempts to urinate.
- Difficulty in urination (spending a long time, straining, passing only small amounts of urine).
- The presence of blood in the urine.
- The presence of a strange odor to the urine.
- Complete urinary tract obstruction, resulting in the inability to pass urine at all. (**Please note that with complete obstruction, it is important to seek immediate veterinary care.** This condition can result in serious complications, including death.)

Probably the biggest confusion for owners is the distinction between **FIC** and **UTI**, because both generally show the same signs. This poses several questions: Why is it important to differentiate between the two, How do we differentiate between the two, and what do we do to “treat” the current problem?

FIC vs UTI

Why: Why is it important to definitively diagnose which diseases we are dealing with? The simple answer is that each disease is treated differently. A cat with a **UTI** is treated with antibiotics, and a cat with **FIC** is not. Many of us have been told at some point when presenting a cat showing such signs, ‘Here, let’s just try some antibiotics and see how they respond.’ And many of us have done this, and seen the cat seemingly respond to such treatment. However, this does not necessarily mean that your cat HAD a **UTI**. To muddy the waters, **FIC** is a condition that often ‘comes and goes,’ even without treatment. Still the question can be asked, ‘So if we give antibiotics to take care of any possible **UTI**’s and if it’s **FIC** and it may clear up on its own, why go through all the testing? Because if your cat does not NEED antibiotics, we should NOT GIVE antibiotics. By doing so we are risking your cat developing resistant bacteria, making it far more difficult to find useful antibiotics when they are needed; besides the fact that again if we do so, we are NOT addressing the problem.

Diagnosis: The ONLY way to discern between the two diseases is through diagnostic testing. It is impossible to tell just by the description of the signs a cat is demonstrating. The most frequent test to run on a cat showing such signs as listed above are to run a complete analysis of the urine.

Other tests commonly recommended are cultures of the urine, abdominal radiographs (X-rays), and occasionally, blood work. By doing these tests, we can rule in or out other causes for such behavior, which include, but are not limited to, bladder stones or tumors.

Treatment: This is where the issue gets the most frustrating, because treatment of **FIC** is not clear-cut or definitive; HOWEVER, treatment can have positive results. If we diagnose your cat

with FIC, we are basically saying that we most likely do NOT know the cause – it is not infection, it is not stones, it is not tumors, etc... However, what we do know is that many to most of these cats have lesions of the bladder cells compatible with inflammation, and that, often episodes are brought on by stress. Treatment is geared mostly to this knowledge.

Analgesics are often prescribed to aid in the inflammation that these cats are experiencing. NEVER self medicate cats with your own medications, many over-the-counter and prescription drugs are extremely dangerous and potentially **DEADLY** to cats.

Environmental enrichment is important for many of these cats. It's hard for us to think of cats as being bored, since they seem to so enjoy curling up on the couch and sleeping for hours on end. But, in reality, boredom is a common problem for many cats. Offering play toys, exercise time, 'jungle gyms,' and attention can often help decrease the stress a cat feels in their lives, thus decreasing the chance for recurring episodes of **FIC**.

Trying to increase the amount of water in you cat's diet is also something that can help decrease the frequency of episodes with cats that suffer from FIC. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to simply introduce canned food into their diet, if you don't already feed them wet food. Canned food has received a 'bad rap' over the years, but it is NOT canned food that causes a cat to have bad teeth. The more likely cause for bad teeth in a cat is simple genetics and poor diet. Canned food does not equal a poor diet, as long as you use a high quality, "name brand" food (Iams / Eukanuba, for example). Actually adding water, low sodium tuna juice, or low sodium broth into your cat's food can also be successful. Offering many sources of water through out the house, dropping ice cubes into the water, and changing the water frequently are also ways to persuade water intake. Finally, purchasing a 'Kitty Fountain' from you local pet store is another unique way to entice a cat to drink.

Feliway is a product that we have found that can help many cats with a various problems. Feliway is a manufactured feline pheromone and it has been found that in the presence of such, many cats are calmer, less anxious, less likely to have urinary problems, less likely to fight, etc. We have had quite a bit of success with this product and recommend it for any and all cant that do have urinary problems, as well as any possible anxiety issues (stress licking ,destructive behavior, aggression towards other animals or people, etc).

There are several sources we would recommend to educate yourself on FIC and many other topic regarding cats. WWW.nssvet.org is an excellent web site for the general public's perusal, and some books are *Cats for Dummies*, *from a Cats Point of View*, *Felinestein*.

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