Idiopathic Urinary Tract Dysfunction in Cats

Feline lower urinary tract (LUT) dysfunction is associated with dysuria, hematuria, peruria, pollakiuria, and stranguria (acute or chronic). No specific underlying cause has been identified with LUT—hence the term idiopathic cystitis. Because feline LUT dysfunction shares many features with interstitial cystitis (IC) in humans, the designation feline interstitial cystitis (FIC) is also commonly used. FIC and IC are associated with certain functional and anatomic abnormalities in the bladder, but these findings do not correlate well with clinical signs. Examination of other tissues and organ systems has revealed many comorbid disorders that also tend to wax and wane. All of them seem to be associated with the body’s stress response system (SRS).

Early life events (eg, prenatal stressors) may activate the SRS, resulting in chronic alterations in the endocrine and autonomic systems’ response to subsequent environmental stress. Genetics should also be considered. Practitioners should look beyond feline LUT signs to other organ systems as well as environment and developmental and familial history. Tailored multimodal environmental modification is beneficial in reducing stress for these patients and should be the focus of therapy. Not only has pharmacologic therapy proven ineffective to date, the stress involved in pilling or medicating may actually worsen matters.

Commentary: The author makes a compelling argument that idiopathic LUT disease in cats may be a result of a more global systemic disorder. Changes (functional or structural) are often not restricted to the urinary bladder but also occur in other body systems. These comorbid conditions may precede or follow LUT disease and be exacerbated by stressful environmental events. The prognosis for these cats depends on a combination of owner commitment, ability to modify a stressful environment, and severity of the disorder. Recurrence is common. Thanks to research like this, we have a better understanding of how the SRS and activation of neural, hormonal, and immune responses can interact with the urinary bladder. However, more needs to be done.—Gregory F. Grauer, DVM, MS, Diplomate ACVIM


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