

ACCES for Pet Health

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Is my cat constipated or straining to urinate?

By Patrick Miles, DVM

A very common presentation at ACCES is the cat that is going in and out of the litter box, and producing either very little urine, no urine, or no stools. The cat may also be straining in locations outside the box. Blood is sometimes noted in or around the litter box or on the floor. It can be very difficult to differentiate if your cat is straining to urinate or defecate, as the posture can be very similar.

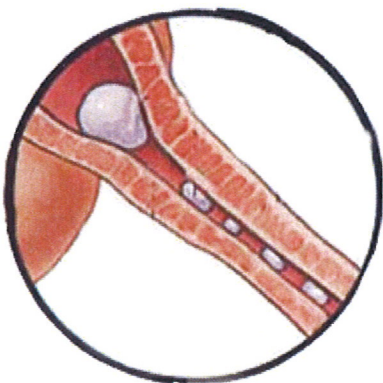
If your cat is exhibiting these symptoms, it may indicate a serious problem that requires immediate veterinary attention. A simple physical exam and complete medical history can often help discern if urinary issues are present or if constipation is the primary problem.

There are many reasons cats strain to urinate. Straining to urinate, or stranguria, may be due to an infection, bladder stones, polyps, tumors, or behavioral issues. Cats can also develop a poorly understood condition termed Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disorder ([FLUTD](#)). A stepwise diagnostic plan starting with urinalysis and urine culture will help elucidate the cause. Radiographs and sometimes abdominal ultrasound are sometimes needed to find stones or bladder cancer. FLUTD is typically a diagnosis of exclusion, meaning all other causes are

ruled out based on diagnostic testing. An unfortunate complication associated with straining to urinate is a complete obstruction of the urethra. All of the listed causes of straining to urinate can lead to an obstruction. Male cats in particular are more prone to obstruction due to the diameter of the urethra. Sometimes a stone will cause the obstruction, but more commonly there is a plug of debris that contains mucous, blood and crystals. This is a medical emergency, and patients can die without prompt attention. Urinary obstructions are less common in female cats, but do occur, and infections are much more common.



If it seems uncomfortable or painful for your cat to use the litterbox, you should see a veterinarian right away.



A blocked urethra in a cat could be life-threatening. However, the condition can be easily treated if you see the vet as soon as your cat exhibits symptoms.

Constipation also has many causes. Dietary changes, foreign objects, underlying metabolic disease, anatomic abnormalities, colonic tumors/polyps, and neurologic disorders may manifest as constipation. A physical exam and digital rectal exam may find underlying causes. Bloodwork is sometimes recommended in severe cases as sometimes an acute kidney problem can lead to dehydration and secondary constipation. Radiographs and sometimes ultrasound are needed in severe cases or when a tumor is a concern. Constipation in general is not a life threatening condition like urinary obstructions but can be extremely uncomfortable. Treatment is based on the underlying cause and may include manual evacuation, enemas, laxatives, etc.



If your cat is straining and uncomfortable, especially if you are not sure they are producing urine, it is always best to have them seen quickly rather than watching and waiting.

Constipation is uncomfortable for your cat but highly treatable.

Posted by [Christina Ryan](#) at September 17, 2009 12:00 a.m.

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