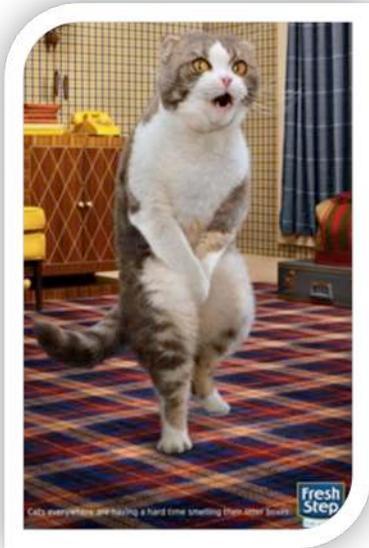


## “The Blocked Cat”

By Maritza Rodriguez, VMD

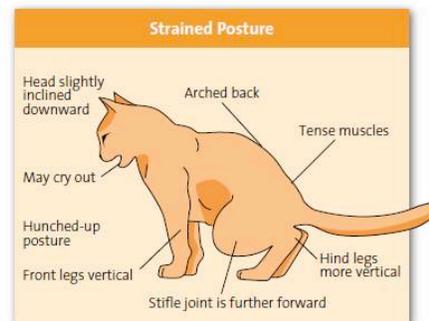
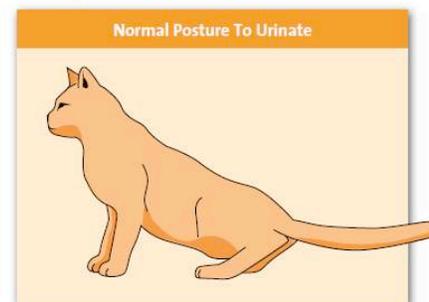


“Dunkin” is a handsome 4 year old male neutered domestic shorthair that presented to the Rt 516 Animal Hospital for a 24 hour history of posturing to urinate in inappropriate areas, crying and seeming uncomfortable while in the litter box. On physical examination, Dunkin was bright and alert but his bladder was very firm and painful. Dunkin was immediately diagnosed with a urethral obstruction. This is also known as a urinary blockage and you may have heard of the term “a blocked cat”. This means his urethra (the small tube that drains urine from the bladder and out of the penis) was completely obstructed or blocked and therefore he was unable to urinate.

Feline urethral obstructions occur most commonly in young to middle age *male* cats (~2-6 years old). It is an **emergency** that must be immediately addressed. Clinical signs to watch for include: straining to urinate, crying during urination, inappropriate urination, passing very small amounts of urine, frequent urination, pink-tinged urine and licking of the genital area. Other signs that you may observe include abdominal pain, lethargy and vomiting. Often times owners think their cat is constipated and straining to defecate but upon further investigation, we find that they are actually having difficulty urinating. A urethral obstruction can be caused by a urethral plug (an accumulation of crystals, protein, white blood cells and red blood cells), small stones, infections, strictures (a narrowing within the urethra) or they can be idiopathic (an unknown cause).

If you report your male cat to be having any of the above listed clinical signs, a veterinarian can determine if he is blocked during their physical examination. We are evaluating for a firm and often painful bladder that cannot express any urine or is only expressing very small amounts of urine. X-rays of the abdomen are often recommended to evaluate if there is a stone causing the

urethral blockage. Blood work is done to check kidney values and electrolytes as they can often rise during the blockage and lead to a very sick patient. The cat is then sedated or placed under general anesthesia so that a urinary



[http://www.vna.hillsvet.ca/pdf/en-us/Urinary\\_Health\\_Feline.pdf](http://www.vna.hillsvet.ca/pdf/en-us/Urinary_Health_Feline.pdf)

catheter can be passed through the urethra and into the bladder thus effectively clearing the blockage and allowing urine to flow freely. The catheter is usually attached to a urinary collection system so that we can monitor how much urine the patient is producing. A sterile sample of urine is collected and analyzed to check for blood, white blood cells, bacteria and crystals. This is an important diagnostic step as it will help determine the course of treatment. Once a urinary catheter is in place, the patient is usually hospitalized for at least two days so that the catheter can stay in place for about 36 hours. The cat is then treated with IV fluids, pain medications, a medication to relax the urethra and antibiotics if warranted. Treatments will vary as they are tailored specifically to each patient and depend on blood work values and results of the x-rays. If a bladder or urethral stone is seen, surgery may be recommended to remove the stone after the patient is unblocked.

After a patient is successfully treated for their urinary obstruction, we often recommend implementing environmental and dietary changes at home to help reduce the chance of another obstruction. If crystals are found within the analyzed urine sample, we recommend slowly transitioning to a prescription urinary diet as this can decrease the chance of crystal and stone formation. We also encourage patients to drink more water or eat a wet food only diet. If there are multiple cats in the household, we recommend decreasing their stress at home by having a rule of 1 litter box per cat plus 1.

**Key Points:**

- Always watch male cats for the following clinical signs:



- If you notice the above signs, this may be a potentially **life threatening emergency** and your pet should be seen as soon as possible!

After treatment for the blockage, we are happy to report that Duncan is doing great!