

Feline Asthma

What is it?

Feline Asthma is a condition that affects the airways causing them to be inflamed and narrow. This occurs in response to irritation by allergens or other stimulants. Therefore, cats can have trouble breathing. Over time the airways can become permanently narrowed, causing scarring to the lung tissue and irreversible damage.

Feline asthma can be aggravated by allergens such as cigarette smoke, dust from cat litter, carpets, household cleaners, and seasonal allergies such as certain grasses. Stressful events can also trigger asthmatic episodes in some cats.

What are the signs?

Cats with asthma may cough (sometimes mistaken for hairballs), have laboured breathing (dyspnea), wheezing, or pant like a dog (open- mouth breathing). Cats with severe symptoms, such as laboured breathing or panting, are classified as an emergency.

How do we diagnose Asthma?

If, after a thorough clinical examination, we are concerned that your cat may have asthma, we will recommend further tests to confirm the diagnosis. Blood tests will be performed to look for evidence of inflammation and parasites. Chest x-rays are taken and can be very useful to rule out other causes of respiratory disease. A further test we perform is taking sample of the cells from the airway. This does require a general



anaesthetic and camera (bronchoscope) to be inserted into the airway. The airway is washed (airway lavage) with a small amount of fluid, which is then removed and examined under the microscope. It is tested for evidence of inflammation (swelling) and infection.

Treatment

Any cat that has a severe breathing problem should be taken to your nearest veterinary practice immediately. In cats presenting with severe signs, it is important that stress is kept to a minimum. We will support these cases with oxygen. Diagnostic tests are kept to a minimum until they are stabilised.

Treating your cat for asthma requires a combination of therapies. It involves modifying your cat's environment in a similar way to how human asthmatics modify their environment: avoid exposure to cigarette smoke, controlling moulds and mildews, not using perfumes or air fresheners, only using hypoallergenic household cleaning detergents and avoiding dusty cat litter.

Your cat may be prescribed drugs to help reduce the inflammation (swelling) in the airway, such as corticosteroids. And/or drugs to open up the airways, called bronchodilators. Both of these medications can be given by mouth or with the use of an inhaler where tolerated. Inhaled medication's target the airway directly and are also associated with fewer side effects.

Prognosis

Unfortunately, there is not a 'cure' for feline asthma. However, the condition can be successfully managed by carefully monitoring their breathing for increased effort, keeping an eye out for coughing, and intervening with medication when they have flare ups. This can allow cats to live happily with asthma for many years

How to give inhaled medications

It is best to get your cat used to the device before trying to administer medications. It will also help make it less likely for your cat to get frightened and resist the device.

Make the experience as positive as possible for your pet. Slowly and calmly introduce the device and give treats before and afterwards to make the experience as positive as possible.

Start by just using the mask, and gradually build up to holding it on your cat's face for 20-30 seconds. Once your cat becomes comfortable with the mask, attach it to the chamber and familiarize your cat with the entire device.

You will notice the inhalation indicator in the AeroKat Chamber move or flutter when your cat breathes in. This indicates a secure seal on your cat's face, when to administer medication, and helps count the number of breaths your cat takes once the medication is released into the chamber.



Don'ts

- Do not force a cat to take medications if it is too stressful. Instead, discuss alternative treatment with us

Dos

- Give medication exactly as directed
- Attempt to determine the cause of the asthma in the cat's environment
- Learn to recognize the early stages of breathing difficulty. Many owners describe laboured breathing in their cat as the most obvious sign that the Asthma is flaring up



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If you are worried about your cat's health, or want to discuss treatment options, give us a call to make an appointment.