

BLADDER CONTROL

Keep Fido's urinary tract crystal clear.

BY LUCY POSTINS

Inflammation of the bladder (cystitis) or urethra, as well as formation of crystals and infections, is surprisingly common in dogs. The symptoms include straining, increased frequency of urination and the appearance of blood in the urine.

Any time urinary tract problems occur there is a potential risk for serious illness to result, so it's always important to get a proper veterinary diagnosis before treatment begins. Urinary tract infections can track back toward the kidneys if left untreated, resulting in a really painful and debilitating kidney infection.

Urinary tract or bladder inflammation, infections and crystals can also be extremely painful. Vomiting, lethargy and blood in the urine, along with prolonged straining and crying out in pain when attempting to urinate, are serious red flags signaling immediate veterinary attention.

INFECTIONS

Urinary tract infections often require prescription antibiotics to help overcome the bacterial overgrowth. However, many holistic vets dispute whether antibiotic use is actually justified in many cases, claiming that most bladder problems are not actually caused by infections. If antibiotics are prescribed, it's a good idea to supplement with a probiotic to help replenish any good bacteria in the GI tract that may get destroyed as the antibiotics do their work. Adding a couple of tablespoons of plain, live-culture yogurt to the food can also help.

It's important for Fido to be able to relieve himself frequently, especially if he's prone to urinary tract problems. Having to "hold it" for long periods of time can trigger infections. In addition to making proper arrangements for a pup who's home alone all day to get out for bathroom breaks, it's also important to schedule rest stops when traveling. Some pets are anxious outside of their normal surroundings and stress can make the problem worse, as well.

CRYSTALS

If crystals are detected in the urine, it's important to diagnose the type because they require very different treatments. The two main types of crystals, struvite and calcium oxalate, are diametrically opposed to one another.

Struvite crystals are more likely to occur when the urine is too alkaline (or not sufficiently acidic). The approach

here is to try to make the urine more acidic, which may dissolve existing crystals and also help to prevent the development of new ones.

Animals with urine that is too alkaline can also be susceptible to urinary tract infections. Research is ongoing to determine whether one condition causes the other, or the two things just flare up when the pH becomes high. Antibiotics will help to correct a true infection but they should not be used indiscriminately and it's not recommended to use them long-term in an attempt to prevent infections. Calcium oxalate crystals tend to develop when the urine is too acidic or not sufficiently alkaline. Typically, these crystals are treated with a product called calcium citrate, which acts to alkalize the urine and dissolve these crystals as well as help prevent the development of more calcium oxalate.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALTH IS ALL ABOUT BALANCE, AND HELPING THE BODY TO HEAL ITSELF.

Years ago, many pet food manufacturers began adding acidifying substances to their "prescription" foods to help combat struvite crystals, which at the time were the most common crystals to affect pets. Over time, however, these strongly "acidifying" diets caused urine that was too acidic and as a result, the prevalence of calcium oxalate crystals has increased dramatically.

A holistic approach to health is all about balance, and helping the body to heal itself. You can monitor the pH of Fido's urine yourself if you wish, using pH strips, which are now commonly available. Any variances in the pH, which may indicate susceptibility to an infection or crystals developing, can be addressed with occasional supplement use, based on whether the urine has become more acidic or alkaline. Left untreated or undetected, crystals can form into stones that are even more difficult to address.

INCONTINENCE

For issues of incontinence, where the dog loses control of her or his bladder, resulting in accidents and leaks, proper veterinary diagnosis is vital. The problem may be hormonal, behavioral or physiological, and the treatment will depend on the cause.