

Asthma.





Asthma is a disease most commonly seen in middle-aged cats but can affect cats of any age. We still don't fully understand the full mechanics of asthma in cats, but it seems similar to asthma in humans.

The condition causes excessive mucus to form in the airways, the airway walls to become inflamed and the airway muscles go into spasm. These processes lead to airway constriction which causes the clinical signs we see, typically coughing, wheezing and an inability to draw in deep breath.

Sometimes the airway constriction can happen as an acute asthmatic crisis and be a life-threatening event.

What signs suggest my cat has Asthma?

Any of the following signs can be seen in cats with asthma:

-  Cough
-  Change in breathing pattern – short shallow breaths or heavier breathing may be seen
-  Wheezy noise when breathing
-  Sudden onset breathing difficulty

How is Asthma diagnosed?

Usually an x-ray under general anaesthesia is needed to confirm your cat has asthma. However, in some cases we start treatment if we suspect asthma before we have taken x-rays, as a general anaesthetic may be too risky for your cat.

We may also advise a further test called a bronchial lavage. This is also done under general anaesthetic; we usually would do it at the same time as the chest x-ray. We flush saline through a catheter into the lungs and suck it back out again to try and collect a sample of cells from the airways. This is then examined under a microscope to look for inflammatory cells typically seen in asthma.

Treatment

Steroids are needed to treat asthma; they reduce the inflammation in the airways to control signs of asthma. Treatment is usually life-long.

We normally start your cat on steroid tablets, but it is usually preferred to gradually swap your cat onto a **steroid inhaler**, the same as people. This allows the steroids to get directly into the lungs, so minimises the risk of side effects that can be seen giving tablets long-term.



There are specially designed "spacers" that have a face mask to allow your cat to use an inhaler. While it may take some training to get your cat used to the spacer, it is usually very well tolerated. There are numerous videos online demonstrating how these spacers are used (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CEsgRAFk2I&feature=youtu.be), but we would be able to demonstrate their use to you at the clinic so you are confident using one.

Bronchodilators are often prescribed too to use alongside steroids. These work to relax the muscles around the small airways, helping to open up the airways. Again, these are usually given via an inhaler.

Making some simple changes around the home to reduce air-borne irritants can also help to improve your cats symptoms. You should avoid smoking in the house and minimise the use of perfumes and air fresheners. Use a cat litter that creates minimal dust where possible. TRY HERE

What is the prognosis for my cat?

While we cannot cure asthma, in many cases treatment will dramatically improve your cats clinical signs and many cats live a normal life despite asthma. However in severe cases or if your cat has a sudden severe attack it can be fatal.

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