



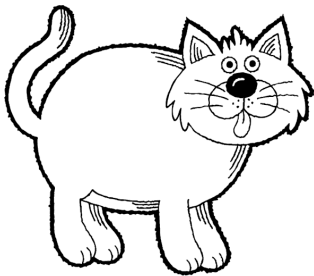
29 Main Street, Truro, NS B2N 4G5

Phone: (902) 893-4331

Fax 897-4442

www.centralnovavet.com

FELINE ASTHMA



Asthma is more common in cats than dogs and is quite similar to that in people. Inhaled allergies and irritants to the lungs are probably the most likely causes:

- Inhaled debris or irritants - dust from cat litter, cigarette smoke, perfume or hairspray, carpet fresheners, and perfumes in laundry detergent
- Pollens or mold
- Infectious agents - viruses, bacteria
- Parasites - heartworms, lungworms

When the airway of the cat is sensitive to certain stimuli, exposure to these agents leads to narrowing of the airways. Regardless of the cause, the end result is the same: muscle spasms in the bronchi (breathing tubes), buildup of mucus and debris. Chronic asthma will cause scarring and permanent narrowing of the airways.

SIGNS:

Coughing and respiratory distress are the most commonly reported signs of obstructive lung disease. Coughing is a significant finding since there are relatively few causes of cough in the cat. Also, many cats assume a squatting position with the neck extending during these coughing episodes. Wheezing is easily heard with the stethoscope and is sometimes so loud that it can be heard by the owners.

DIAGNOSIS:

1. Minimum data base (complete blood count, blood chemistries, fecal exam and urinalysis). These tests will help to assess the general health of the cat and may provide clues as to the underlying cause. One particular type of white blood cell, the eosinophil, is commonly associated with allergic events and may provide support for a tentative diagnosis of asthma.

2. Feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus tests. These tests are helpful in determining the overall health of the cat.

3. Thoracic radiography (chest x-ray). Characteristic changes in the lungs are common on x-rays.

4. Bronchoscopy, cytology and airway lavage (washing). Bronchoscopy is a procedure which allows the veterinarian to



look down the airways of the anesthetized pet with a fiberoptic scope. A small amount of sterile saline can be flushed into the airways to retrieve samples of material from deep in the lung. This material can be cultured for micro-organisms and can also be carefully studied under the microscope.

Some owners decline the complete workup for a variety of reasons (cost being the main one). In such cases, it may be acceptable to treat the cat with a course of corticosteroids (“cortisone” or “steroids”) since most asthmatic cats respond very favorably to these medications without side effects. Corticosteroids can complicate the management of cats harboring secondary bacterial infections; therefore, prophylactic antibiotics are reasonable in cases that an infection is suspected.

TREATMENT

Successful management of allergic lung disease employs several therapies.

1. Any factors known to trigger or aggravate breathing problems should be avoided. In some cases, this may mean trying different brands of cat litter, eliminating cigarette smoke from the home, etc. It is important to pay close attention to environmental factors which may aggravate the condition.

2. Bronchodilators. These drugs are used to open up the airway and allow the cat to move air more freely. They should be used faithfully and as directed to obtain maximum effect. These drugs are usually given orally as pills or capsules, but cats can also be trained to take a puffer.



3. Corticosteroids. Steroids have a beneficial effect on decreasing inflammation, dilating the airway, and decreasing mucus production. When the cat's temperament is a concern, long-acting injections can be given as an alternative to pills. (These injections are not safe to be used in dogs) Also these drugs come as puffers, which is the safest and most effective way to take them.

4. Emergency treatment may employ bronchodilators, oxygen, rapid-acting steroids and epinephrine. Extreme respiratory distress constitutes an emergency and the pet should receive immediate attention.