

FELINE ASTHMA= CHRONIC BRONCHITIS

Feline Asthma

Feline asthma is a common respiratory emergency seen in cats characterized by a sudden onset of coughing, wheezing, and respiratory distress in cats. “Attacks” are precipitated by recent exposure to dust (household, litter box), talcum powder, smoke, or other substances that trigger the onset of an acute allergic response in sensitized cats. An attack can happen at any time however, many are seen in the spring and fall when air conditioning and heating units are turned on for the first time in the season. An asthmatic attack requires prompt attention and treatment should not be delayed.

Symptoms of an Asthma Attack

- Acute onset of labored breathing (dyspnea)
- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Drooling
- Clawing at the face
- Blue / purple gums (cyanosis)
- Open mouth breathing / panting

Diagnosis- on clinical signs and radiographs

- **Physical examination-** the cat will show signs of labored breathing including forceful prolonged expiration, wheezing, coughing, and open mouth breathing.
- Lung sounds will be harsh with expiratory wheezes.
- Generalized abdominal distension and a distended gas filled stomach is often palpated.
- Mucous membranes (gums) can be cyanotic with a blue or purple tinge.
- **Radiographs (x-rays)** of the chest show an expanded lung field and a prominent bronchial pattern within the lung fields is seen.
- Radiographs should be taken in all cats suspected of asthma once cats are stable enough. In severely dyspneic animals, treatment must be initiated on physical signs only for restraint needed for x-rays may kill the cat.

Treatment of acute asthmatic attack

- Steroids (prednisone, dexamethasone).
- Bronchodilators- drugs which open up the small airways which are closed due to spasm.
- Oxygen therapy (incubator or cage pumped with oxygen).
- Sedatives- to relax frantic cats due to their inability to breath normally.

Long term treatment involves use of steroids- either daily oral prednisone, or long acting injections of prednisolone.

***Acupuncture has also been used successfully to treat feline asthma patients.

Prognosis

Guarded to fair depending on duration of attack, individual response to treatment, and on identifying and removing the source of bronchitis.

It is most important to try to identify the underlying cause of the attack and remove the source such as switch to a less dusty litter or use torn paper in the cat box. As long as the inciting cause is present, the cat will likely suffer from chronic bronchitis and acute asthma attacks.