

FELINE ASTHMA

Feline asthma is an allergic condition in which the smaller airways that lead into the lungs (bronchi and bronchioles) become inflamed and constrict. This constriction prevents air from flowing into the lungs. Asthma is an allergic response to inhaled irritants such as aerosol, pollutants, perfumes, smoke, etc. This is a life-long disease that will require medical management.

Management of this disease includes bronchodilators that will work to expand the airways, and steroids that will work to decrease the inflammation within the airways. Inhaled medications include Albuterol and Flovent. The Albuterol is an aerosolized bronchodilator and the Flovent is an aerosolized steroid (Fluticasone). These inhalers are given using a specialized chamber called the AeroCat. Oral medications include prednisone, a steroid and theophylline, a bronchodilator. Any combination of these inhalers and/or oral medications can be given to alleviate your cat's clinical signs. In time, with proper management, these medications can be tapered to a lower maintenance dose. In some instances, an antibiotic may be given to treat a secondary infection of the airways.

You can minimize the risk of your cat suffering from another asthma attack by removing some of the inhaled irritants in your household. For example, minimizing dust exposure and eliminating tobacco smoke can greatly alleviate your cat's clinical signs. In addition, you may want to consider changing the kitty litter to something that is dust-free, such as shredded newspapers or pelleted litter material. The use of perfumes and aerosol sprays should also be minimized. Your cat should also be kept indoors (with the windows closed) so that he/she can be monitored closely for any signs of respiratory distress and to prevent exposure to outdoor allergens that may trigger an asthma attack.

If you notice that your cat is having trouble breathing (i.e. increased respiratory rate of >60/minute, increased respiratory efforts, open-mouth breathing, blue/gray color of the gums/tongue, etc.) you can give 2 puffs of the Albuterol inhaler immediately. If his/her clinical signs do not improve, you should bring him/her to see a veterinarian immediately for supportive care (i.e. oxygen therapy, steroid injections, etc.).