



Associated Veterinary Specialists, PC, LTD
12462G Natural Bridge Road
Bridgeton, Missouri 63044
314-739-1510
Emergency 314-739-3330

Asthma in Cats

Although there is some debate about the definition, most clinicians and researchers agree that asthma is caused by an allergic reaction to inhaled allergens, particles that stimulate a cat's immune system.

When a susceptible cat first inhales an allergen, her system creates specific antibodies to target that antigen. When the cat is exposed to that antigen again, these antibodies recognize the allergen and start a cascade of events that bring many different types of immune cells to the airways. These immune cells then trigger the production of substances that promote inflammation, a condition that results in irritation, swelling, and reactive constriction of the airways. As a result, the diameter of the airways may decrease and mucus may accumulate within the passages. All these processes limit the ability of air to move through the airways and cause the cat to experience difficulty breathing.

The average age of cats diagnosed with asthma is between 4 and 5 years. It doesn't appear that one sex is more susceptible to asthma, and although some studies suggest that Siamese cats may be predisposed to asthma, this has not been definitively proven.

Clinical signs that may be seen in a cat with asthma may include the following:

- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing
- Rapid breathing
- Coughing or hacking
- Open-mouthed breathing
- Vomiting

There is no single, specific test that can definitively diagnose asthma. Instead, veterinarians rely on information gathering and testing to arrive at a diagnosis. If a veterinarian suspects your cat may have asthma, they may recommend the following diagnostic tests:

- History and physical examination
- Complete blood count, chemistry panel and urinalysis



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-Chest x-rays or CT scan

-Bronchoscopy- this test uses a scope with a camera that is passed through the mouth and down into the airways of the lungs. During this procedure a sample can be obtained for culture and for evaluation under the microscope to look for inflammation.

Since asthma in cats can present similar to other diseases, it's crucial to rule out other conditions that can cause similar signs and give similar test results. Diseases that may present similar to asthma include:

-Chronic bronchitis

-Infestation with lungworms

-Migration of other parasites into the lungs

-Pneumonia

Drugs used to treat these other conditions may not be appropriate for a cat with asthma, and may do more harm than good.

Treatment of asthma may include the following treatments:

-Corticosteroids (inhaled or oral). Go to this link to watch a video on how to administer inhaled or oral medications to your cat

Inhaler: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CEsgRAFk2I>

How to give a pill: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWlpsTh6ddk>

-Bronchodilators- used to help dilate the airways

Feline asthma is often a progressive condition that fails to improve significantly over time, and affected cats may experience occasional asthmatic flare-ups that vary in intensity from mild to life threatening. Although cats can never be truly "cured" of asthma, by carefully monitoring their respiratory effort,



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keeping an eye out for coughing, and intervening with medication when they need help, owners can help their asthmatic cats live happily for years.

Kimberly Loyd, DVM, DACVIM

Reference: Cornell Feline Health Center