

Cat Asthma

Overview

- Just like humans, cats can also suffer from asthma (also known as feline asthma and allergic bronchitis).
- Common symptoms include coughing, wheezing, and noisy breathing.
- Fortunately, most cats with asthma can be treated with daily medication that enables them to live a relatively normal and happy life.
- Unfortunately, left untreated, and in severe cases, feline asthma can cause life threatening asthma attacks.

General information



Just like humans, cats can suffer from asthma (inflammation and narrowing of the airways). Vets aren't exactly sure what causes it, but it's thought to be because of an allergy to particles in the air (such as pollen and dust). To start with, asthma causes a mild cough, and then over time, the airways become gradually more inflamed, narrow and sensitive, which can lead to life-threatening asthma attacks. Fortunately, most asthmatic cats respond well to medication, but in severe cases/cases that don't respond to treatment, asthma can shorten life expectancy. Asthma in cats tends to develop at a young age (around or before 4-5 years old), and is more common in [Siamese](#) and [Oriental](#) breeds.

Symptoms

Symptoms of asthma in cats include:

- Coughing (can come and go, and sometimes cause vomiting)
- Noisy breathing and wheezing
- Fast breathing
- **Severe difficulty breathing** - contact your vet immediately if your cat is struggling to breathe - asthma attacks can be fatal.

Diagnosis

Before diagnosing your cat with asthma, your vet will want to rule out anything else (such as an airway infection or a heart problem). They will examine your cat, listen to their chest with a stethoscope, and may need to run blood tests and take x-rays of their lungs (under anaesthetic). Depending on what your vet finds, they may also want to run other tests such as 'bronchoalveolar lavage/BAL', which involves collecting cells from the lungs and looking at them under a microscope.

If for some reason investigation isn't possible, and your vet thinks asthma is highly likely, they may suggest trying some asthma medication, and monitoring your cat's response.

Treatment

Treatment for feline asthma usually includes the following:

Steroids - steroids help reduce symptoms and prevent asthma attacks. They need to be given every day, ideally by inhaler (but can also be given as tablets or liquid).

Bronchodilators - some asthmatic cats also benefit from bronchodilators (drugs to widen the airways and help them breathe more easily). These are usually best given daily as a tablet.

Reducing triggers - cats with asthma have extremely sensitive lungs that react to particles in the air (such as smoke and dust). For this reason, it's really important to keep the air your cat breathes as pure as possible. You can do this by avoiding sprays, incense sticks, plugs-in diffusers, and by vacuuming regularly. It's also really important to have a [smoke-free household](#). It's best to use a dust free litter, wet food, and keep your cat slim ([obesity](#) can make asthma worse). If your cat spends most of their time indoors, it may help to use an air filter.



Asthma attacks

Asthma attacks are serious, and potentially life-threatening episodes where your cat's airways become severely narrow and can even close completely.

If your cat is [struggling to breathe](#)/mouth breathing/having an asthma attack:

- **Keep them calm (extremely important)**
- **Take them to your vet straight away - if possible, get someone to call your vet to let them know you are arriving and why.**

Pet inhalers

The best way to give an asthmatic cat steroids is by inhaler. This is so it only reaches the lungs where it's needed, and reduces the chance of any unwanted side effects. The thought of using a pet inhaler may seem daunting but it is often possible with a little bit of training.



Teaching your cat to accept an inhaler - complete these steps slowly over a couple of weeks, it's really important that the training isn't rushed and that your cat is happy with each stage before moving onto the next.

1. Show your cat the inhaler and give them a delicious treat so they start thinking of it as a positive thing. Practice this several times.
2. Shake the inhaler and give them a treat so they also think of the noise as a positive thing. Practice this several times.
3. If they are curious and want to investigate the inhaler, reward them with treat.
4. Encourage them to put their nose into the mask by putting treats inside it. Practice this several times.
5. Hold the mask up to your cat's face and give them a treat afterwards. Gradually increase the time you hold it over their face, each time

following with a treat. Make sure they are calm the whole time and stop immediately if they show any [signs of stress](#).

6. When your cat is happy having their nose in the mask for a short period of time, deliver their medication as instructed by your vet. **Reward them with a treat afterwards.**

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if you think your cat might have asthma or you have noticed any of the symptoms listed above. If your cat is having trouble breathing, take them to your vet straight away.

You know your cat best - even if they don't have the exact symptoms listed above, contact your vet if you're concerned.

Cost

Treatment for feline asthma can be expensive, especially because it's a lifelong condition that requires regular check-ups. It's important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your cat. There is often more than one treatment option, so if one doesn't work for you and your cat then your vet may be able to offer another.

Consider [insuring your cat](#) as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

Published: October 2020