

My Dog or Cat Can't Urinate

If your pet is unable to produce or pass urine, it is a life-threatening situation, and it is important that you take your pet to your veterinarian immediately.

The most common cause of not urinating is that something is blocking the urethra, preventing the bladder from emptying (the urethra is the tube that connects the bladder to the genitals for the removal of fluids from the body). In this situation, urine is still being produced and filling the bladder but can't make its way out. Some reasons for urinary obstruction include:

- **Bladder stones** - Hard or calcified deposits of minerals that form in the urinary bladder
- **Bladder or urethral mass** - A lump or tumor found on or around the bladder or along the urethra
- **Mucus plug** - Made up of mucus, protein and crystals that can block the urethra of a male cat

Not being able to urinate can cause the urine to back up into the kidneys, which can then lead to kidney failure very quickly. Kidney failure allows toxins to build up in the bloodstream which can cause heart problems and other organs to fail. This occurs most often in male cats but can happen to female cats and dogs of both genders, too.

Veterinary Treatment includes:

- Applying gentle pressure and manipulating the penis, in male cats, to relieve the obstruction. Female cats rarely get a urethral obstruction. When they do, it is usually caused by bladder stones that lodge in the urethra just as it leaves the bladder.
- Removing urine from the bladder by inserting a urinary catheter into the bladder
- Using intravenous (IV) fluids to flush the bladder and the bloodstream
- Administering antibiotics to treat any underlying infection

Treatment usually requires multiple-day hospitalization to help prevent re-blockage and to treat the underlying cause.

In some hard-to-treat or recurring cases, a surgical procedure to bypass or remove the blockage may be required. The blockage usually occurs higher up in the urethra where it bends in a U shape. The most common surgeries would be bladder surgery to remove the stones or a perineal urethrostomy to bypass the area of blockage.

A more serious situation that causes a pet not to be able to urinate is severe renal failure. In this case, the kidneys produce little or no urine. Signs include vomiting, loss of appetite, lack of urination, lethargy, depression and collapse. Toxins such as antifreeze and certain drugs, a severe infection, trauma or severe anaphylactic shock can cause renal failure. IV fluids, drugs to stimulate urine production, supportive care and hospitalization are common forms of treatment. The prognosis, however, is guarded for pets with severe renal failure.

How can I help my pet prevent urinary obstructions?

In many cases, a pet's inability to urinate is out of the owner's hands. But there are a few ways that you can help to reduce the risk for this serious condition.

- **Encourage regular urination:** Emptying the bladder on a regular basis can help prevent the build up of bladder stones.

- **For Dogs:** Increase the number of trips outside. While female dogs typically empty their bladders completely when they urinate, male dogs often only urinate small amounts at a time, storing a reservoir for marking territory. Male dogs may benefit from taking long walks before bed, allowing them to completely empty their bladders.
- **For Cats:** Clean the litter box daily to encourage use. You can also consider adding additional litter boxes to ensure that another option is always available.
- **Increase water intake:** Encouraging your pet to drink more water causes them to urinate more often.
- Increase the number of available water bowls and refill often.
- **Specialized Diets:** Certain veterinary diets can help to prevent bladder stones and other urinary tract issues. Your veterinarian can recommend the best diet for your pet.

Need more information?

If you are interested in learning more about this condition or if you would like to discuss more prevention measures, please feel free to [reach out to your veterinarian](#) for a consultation.