



Straining to Pee in Cats and Dogs

There are many causes of straining to pee in cats and dogs. The most common causes are bladder inflammation or urinary tract infection, which are usually an “easy fix”. Other causes, like urinary blockage and bladder stones, are more complicated to treat. It is helpful for foster caregivers to have a good plan for straining to pee, should it occur. It is good for them to know what to look for, recognize when emergency veterinary attention is needed, and understand what care can be given at home.

Differentiating Between Straining to Pee or Poop

- The symptoms of each are very similar. This is why you should monitor for both pooping and peeing. If there is poop coming out, how easily is it coming out? Is it diarrhea or hard stool?
- The Maddie’s Straining to Poop in Cats and Dogs flash class should help with recognizing symptoms that are more specific to pooping.

Monitoring Straining to Pee

- Monitoring begins with recognizing symptoms that your foster pet is uncomfortable when trying to pee. You may notice this before it progresses to straining to pee:
 - Cats may go in and out of the litter box more frequently, and dogs may ask to go outside more often.
 - Peeing in inappropriate locations is very common. Cats sometimes associate their litter box with discomfort while eliminating, so will avoid using it. Dogs often have an increased urgency to pee, and may not get outside quickly enough. While accidents in the house can be behavior related, assume a medical cause until proven otherwise. It is very important to remember that – contrary to popular belief – pets do not pee or poop in inappropriate areas for “spite” or because they are “angry.”
 - You may notice excessive licking of the genital area, and in more severe cases, crying out in pain while attempting to pee, vomiting, lethargy, or lack of appetite.
- Pay close attention to the volume and color of the pee:



- Despite how often a cat goes into the litter box or a dog goes outside, is anything actually happening? Is there a normal steady stream of pee coming out each time, are there very small amounts coming out, or is nothing coming out at all? This can be harder to determine in cats, as opposed to dogs who are walked outside on a leash, but the presence and diameter of clumps in the litter box can indicate what is happening.
- Frequent peeing of small amounts or no output are abnormal. Do keep in mind that dogs tend to “mark”, so frequent peeing of small amounts can sometimes be normal. Observe for additional signs, and don’t hesitate to contact the foster manager if you are not sure.
- Is the pee yellow, dark yellow, cloudy, bloody, or blood-tinged? Yellow is normal, dark yellow is associated with dehydration. Cloudy, bloody, and blood-tinged are often seen with urinary tract problems.

When to Contact the Foster Manager

- You should contact the foster manager when you notice straining to pee. It is never normal, regardless of the volume of pee coming out.
- Mild to moderate straining is defined by normal to slightly decreased output, and it may be an emergency.
- Little or no output indicates severe straining to pee, and this is definitely an emergency. This is seen with urinary blockage, which is especially common in male cats. The urethra becomes plugged with debris or a stone, pee cannot be emptied from the bladder, and the pet becomes very sick. A blocked pet can even die if not immediately treated by a veterinarian.
- Even if there is no obvious straining, any symptoms of a bladder problem should be brought to the foster manager’s attention. These symptoms include crying out in pain while attempting to pee, frequent peeing of small amounts, and pee that is bloody or blood-tinged. Your foster pet should see a veterinarian as soon as possible, before the problem becomes more severe or an emergency.
- Don’t hesitate to contact the foster manager if you have any concerns or questions. It’s better to be safe than sorry.

What Foster Caregivers Can Do at Home

- Gather History
 - Gathering history for the veterinary team can help with diagnosis and treatment of urinary tract issues.
 - Has the pet had previous urinary tract issues? If so, are there any medical records of past diagnoses and treatments? This information may not always be available, like with stray cats. But owners surrendering pets should be asked questions about previous medical



history and encouraged to give permission for the shelter or rescue group to request medical records from the owner's veterinarian.

- Have there been recent diet changes? Was a special urinary tract diet being fed previously, but your pet is no longer on it?
- What urinary tract symptoms are you noticing? Have they gotten better, worse, or stayed the same since first seen?

- Encourage Water Intake

- Encourage water intake. This will help flush crystals and grit out of the bladder.
- Use pet water fountains and place more bowls of fresh water around the house.
- Feed watered-down canned food.
- With cats, you can offer juice from a can of salmon or tuna, either by itself or mixed with canned food. You can also entice them to play with and drink running water from faucets.

- Daily Assessment

- Daily Assessment is important. This will allow you to monitor whether your foster pet is getting better, worse, or staying the same. It is also important to watch for additional symptoms like vomiting, not eating, or lethargy.
- To learn more about how to monitor for signs of illness or stress, and how to solve litter box problems, see these Maddie's flash classes:
 - Maddie's Daily Assessment of Foster Pets
 - Maddie's Solving Litter Box Problems

- Give Medication and Special Diets

- Give medications and special diets as directed by a veterinarian.
- Commonly used medications are antibiotics, which treat urinary tract infections, and anti-inflammatories which treat bladder inflammation. Occasionally, antispasmodics are given to relax the urethra or subcutaneous fluids to flush crystals out of the bladder. Do not discontinue any of these treatments too early, even if the urinary issues have resolved. Finish out the prescription to help prevent recurrence of the problem.
- Special urinary tract diets help dissolve or prevent crystals and urinary stones. If your pet is on a prescription diet, it is important to avoid feeding other foods and treats unless instructed to do so by a veterinarian. Feeding anything other than the prescription diet, in many cases, defeats the purpose of giving it in the first place.

- Follow-Up Appointments

- Be diligent about follow-up appointments as recommended by a veterinarian, even if your foster pet seems to be doing great.



- The veterinarian may want a recheck urinalysis to be sure that the urinary tract infection or bladder inflammation is completely resolved, or repeat radiographs to see if urinary stones have resolved or recurred.

