Special Diets for Urinary Crystals in Cats

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Q. When my pet gets a urinary tract infection, why might a diet change be recommended?

A. Some pets with urinary tract infections also have crystals which form in their urine. Sometimes, the crystals form before the infections starts, and sometimes, after the infection is already there. These crystals, which are like fine sand, irritate the bladder. They can also develop into much larger bladder stones (urinary calculi). In male cats, the crystals may plug the urethra (the tube that leads from the bladder, through the penis, to the outside of the cat). This is a life-threatening condition, since the cat would be unable to urinate.
The two most common crystals are struvite and oxalate. Struvite crystals are more likely to form in urine that has an alkaline pH. If struvite crystals are a problem, special diets are available to make the urine acidic. This acidic pH may prevent the crystals from forming. These diets include Purina CNM UR-Formula, Royal Canine Urinary SO, and Hill's c/d, r/d, s/d, and w/d. These diets are also lower in the minerals that make up the crystals such as magnesium and phosphorous. They are also formulated to product more dilute urine, so crystals are less likely to form. The diets are available through your veterinarian. Some of these diets are used to treat existing problems and are given for several months only. Others are used to prevent the condition from occurring in the future and can be fed for the lifetime of the animal.

Special diets are available that decrease the probability of oxalate crystals forming in the urine. These include Hill's x/d and c/d, Royal Canine Urinary SO, and Purina CNM UR-Formula.

For some animals with a history of urinary tract infections or crystals, a canned diet is recommended. Canned diets contain larger amounts of water and may help "flush out" the urinary tract and make crystals less likely to form.

So, depending on the type of crystals seen in your pet's urine, a different diet may help prevent the recurrence of the problem.

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