

## Feline Asthma/Bronchitis

Feline asthma is also known by the terms bronchitis, reactive airway disease, and allergic lower airway disease. Asthma causes the airways (bronchi) in the lungs to sporadically constrict. This condition is termed bronchoconstriction, and reduces airflow to the lungs. This is typically manifested by open-mouthed breathing in the cat. Bronchitis causes the airways to become inflamed. This results in some narrowing of the airways, as well as excessive mucus production, which leads to chronic coughing in addition to difficulty breathing. Most cats have a combination of asthma and bronchitis.

It can be caused by bacterial infections, parasites such as heartworm disease, allergies or inhaled irritants. In many cases, the underlying cause may not be identified.

The most common signs of bronchitis and asthma in cats include wheezing, coughing, or difficulty breathing. The cough can mimic vomiting and some owners state the cat is acting like it wants to throw up a hairball. Severity can vary from mild to severe. An acute attack can be life-threatening and require emergency treatment with oxygen therapy and hospitalization.

Diagnosis of feline asthma/bronchitis is made by a combination of the history, physical examination findings, chest x-rays (thoracic radiographs), and bronchoscopy under general anesthesia to collect samples of airway secretions.

The mainstay of treatment of cats suffering from asthma/bronchitis is the careful use of inhalant or oral corticosteroids. Bronchodilators may also be added. It is recommended that all exposure to cigarette smoke, dusts (cat litter, carpet powders, grooming/flea powders), and sprays/perfumes be eliminated.

Generally, the prognosis for most cases is good with lifelong therapy.

