URINARY TRACT OBSTRUCTION  
(URETHRAL OBSTRUCTION, URINARY BLOCKAGE, BLOCKED TOM)

What is it? A urinary tract obstruction occurs when there is a blockage of urine flow from the bladder through the external urethra. Stones, tumors, mucus plugs, and strictures can contribute to an obstruction.

What animals are affected? Urinary tract obstructions occur in both dogs and cats. Dogs most commonly present due to obstructions from stones. Cats more frequently present with mucous plug obstructions related to feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD), a combination of lower urinary tract problems in cats. The most serious cases of urinary tract obstruction are often seen in young male cats with a history of feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD).

What are the signs? Symptoms may include frequent straining to urinate, dribbling urine, posturing to urinate but inability to void any urine, blood in the urine, abdominal pain, and vomiting.

How is it diagnosed? A physical exam often reveals a large, turgid, painful bladder. Radiographs (x-rays) can be helpful in detecting stones in the bladder or urethra. Abdominal ultrasound is used to look for certain types of stones or tumors in the bladder that may be difficult to see on radiographs. A urinalysis is helpful in determining if infection is a contributing factor and to help target the ideal therapy.

How is it treated? Pets with urinary obstructions must be treated quickly. These cases are always considered an emergency. Most often, sedation or anesthesia will be required and a urinary catheter must be passed to relieve the obstruction and to drain the urine. The catheter may need to remain in place for a few days until infection can be treated or until surgery can be arranged (if necessary).

If left untreated, even for a short period of time, pets with urinary tract obstructions can become very sick very quickly. Dangerous elevations in the kidney enzymes and potassium level can occur rapidly. In critical situations, extremely ill pets may need to be hospitalized for several days of aggressive care, IV fluid therapy, and urinary catheter management.

What after care is needed? Follow-up urinalysis and imaging (either radiographs or ultrasound) may be indicated depending on the cause of the obstruction. Some pets may require a prescription food to help prevent urinary tract problems.

What is the prognosis? The prognosis is generally good if the obstruction is caught early. If left untreated, pets with urinary tract obstructions can deteriorate quickly, and they can die of complications from the obstruction.

Can it be prevented? Possibly. When dogs and cats exhibit symptoms of urinary tract problems, evaluation by a veterinarian and diagnostic testing can help determine the underlying condition and best treatment plan before a dangerous obstruction develops.