



ASTHMA IN CATS

Asthma in cats is also called **allergic** airway disease or allergic bronchial disease. The two **main changes** that occur are:

- (1) **Inflammation** of the airway tubes (bronchi); and
- (2) **Constriction** (narrowing) of these airways.

The **main signs** cats show can be **coughing** or **wheezing**, **loud breathing** and in severe cases, **difficulty breathing**. These signs can be caused by other conditions such as heart disease, chest infections and even cancers so it's important for a proper diagnosis to make sure of the cause.

Testing for asthma in people usually focuses on blowing into a 'peak flow meter' which checks mostly the degree of narrowing of the airways. Of course, this isn't practical for cats so we reach a **diagnosis** by confirming there is airway inflammation (with **radiographs**) and finding out what that inflammation is due to with a **bronchial wash**.

Asthma is a condition that we manage, as opposed to fully treat, so cats usually need lifelong medicating to some degree. The **treatments** are to:

- (1) **Reduce the inflammation** (with cortisone type medications); and
- (2) **Open up the airways** (bronchodilators).

Treatments can be given orally but it is better to aim the treatments at the airways specifically with inhaled medications. We use **puffers** just **like** those used in **people!** Cats can't be taught to take a deep breath from the puffer as people can, so we use a '**breathing chamber**' the same as those used for asthmatic children (who also can't take deep breaths). Many cats can have a secondary infection to their asthma and will usually need an initial course of antibiotics, also.

Just like people, signs can be worsened by exposure to pollens or fumes such as cigarette smoke, incense or powdered carpet cleaners.

With regular treatment, many cats can lead normal lives but some occasionally have flare-ups at certain times of the year.

IMPORTANT: If your cat is showing any signs of breathing difficulty, seek IMMEDIATE veterinary attention.