

What are Interdigital Cysts in Dogs?

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Interdigital cysts are large bumps or nodules between a dog's toes. They can also be called interdigital furuncles, follicular pododermatitis, or podofurunculosis.

Interdigital cysts usually appear as red nodules filled with blood and/or pus. They are most commonly found on the front paws. Dogs may limp from the pain, especially when walking on uneven surfaces, or lick or chew at their paws.

What Causes Interdigital Cysts?

Any irritation or injury to the haired skin of the paws can cause "plugged," or dilated, hair follicles. These dilated follicles then develop into nodules that are prone to rupture, thus causing more irritation, and skin infections as well.

When a dog develops interdigital cysts, it's important to work with the vet to determine why they're occurring. Multiple factors may be involved, including:

Hair coat - Dogs with a short and coarse hair coat may be more likely to have inflamed and ruptured follicles. Breeds with this type of coat include English Bulldogs, Great Danes, Basset Hounds, Mastiffs, Bull Terriers and Boxers.

Paw shape - Dogs with wider paws can be more likely to bear weight on the haired skin between the pads. Breeds with this type of paw shape, or conformation, include Labrador Retrievers, English Bulldogs, German Shepherds and Pekingese.

Obesity - Dogs that are overweight can put more pressure on the spaces between their toes when they walk.

Difficulty walking - Dogs that have arthritis or other joint problems can put more pressure on the interdigital spaces when walking.

Licking and other itchy behaviour - Dogs that lick or chew at their paws can cause hair and skin irritation that lead to interdigital cysts. In these dogs, diagnosing and managing the underlying cause of itching, such as allergies, is part of treating and preventing interdigital cysts.

Environment - Skin trauma from cages or rough ground can damage hair follicles.

How are they Diagnosed?

The veterinarian may need to take skin samples to diagnose and treat them because many other skin conditions can cause nodules on a dog's paws. These skin conditions include demodectic mange from *Demodex* mites, skin cancers and fungal infections.

How are Interdigital Cysts Treated?

Many become infected and need antibiotics. Anti-bacterial shampoos can also help treat the skin infection. If the paw swelling is severe, an anti-inflammatory medication to reduce the swelling and pain may be prescribed. The vet may also recommend surgical procedures or protective foot wear.

Your veterinarian will also work with you to determine what's causing the interdigital cysts. If the underlying causes aren't diagnosed and treated, they could return and cause scarring. Diagnosing why your dog is developing them can reduce the need for medications, such as antibiotics, and make your pet more comfortable.



Blocked Cats are an Emergency

When something happens to stem the flow of a cat's urine, trouble ensues—and fast.

Urine has lots of good things in it. In many cases, they are substances that cats or people can't live without, such as potassium, sodium, and water. A body, and most specifically the kidneys, senses and adjusts the composition of bodily fluids and drop the excess into the urine. If a person eats a large serving of chips, covered with salt, the kidneys dump the unwanted excess of sodium into the urine. The same is true with many other substances, like water, that need to be regulated. Urine is (usually) sterile, so unless there is a urinary tract infection urine is pure. It's not the terrible stuff that many kids make it out to be. True, it does have the waste products of metabolism in it, which a body needs to remove.

And that's where some of the problems begin. If the flow of urine stops, those waste products build up and negatively impact the way the body works. One of the most common ways that happens is when a cat's urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the litter box) gets blocked. Known in veterinary practices as a 'blocked cat,' this poorly understood disorder is seen with alarming frequency at vet clinics.

Clinics can see two to three cats per week who cannot urinate. Cats can be in all stages of the disease, from the early onset ones who just seem a little painful and have a big, hard bladder to the nearly dead ones that are in many cases beyond saving.

The actual plug that stops the flow can be made of bladder stones (often erroneously called kidney stones), tumours or a gooey mix of mucus and protein known as 'matrix' that has the consistency of toothpaste. How and why matrix forms, no one knows, despite a few decades of investigation. The causes go beyond a mucousy plug, as well. A host of other factors, such as stress, lack of access to water, diet, infectious agents, indoor lifestyle, and many other causes have been implicated as being responsible for the lead-up to getting blocked. Those little plugs don't form in a vacuum: something causes them to form, and we don't know with any certainty what factors contribute to it.

Cats that are blocked often show the following signs;

- Straining repeatedly in the litter box (often mistaken for constipation)
- Crying or howling
- Lick at the genitals/below the base of the tail
- Hiding

If you notice your cat showing any of the above signs, arrange an appointment as soon as possible. Don't delay as a few hours can make a big difference. The longer those toxins circulate unchecked, the more pain the cat experiences and the more veterinary assistance will be required.

In advanced cases, where the urine flow has been stopped for more than 24 hours, cats can become systemically ill from retained toxins and start vomiting, or become very weak and lethargic. Your pet can deteriorate rapidly.

The course after unblocking these cats is just as unpredictable and mysterious as the factors leading up to the obstruction; some cats are discharged and never suffer another episode, while others will have repeated occurrences days, weeks or years later.

Managing these cases medically can go way beyond relieving the obstruction in some cases. First priority is fixing the plumbing problem: getting urine to flow. This is usually done with anesthesia and a catheter to remove the obstruction. Managing the havoc wreaked by toxins is next. This can necessitate some fine skills as the veterinarian tries to put things back in place. However getting the urine to flow and taking the cat home is the easy part. After the episode, lifestyle changes are necessary: medical tweaks, medical rechecks, and diet changes that try to extend the initial complexity of this disease across months or years. This can become quite complex.

If you see any signs or are concerned that your cat has a blockage, please contact one of our clinics as soon as possible.

