

## The Paralyzed Cat

You come home, or wake up, and find your beloved cat howling in pain and unable to use its back legs. Your cat may even be panting. What has happened? What do you do?

First, take a deep breath and stop panicking. This will help to calm your cat and reassure it. It is already upset and if it senses you are upset, the cat will only get more upset.

Next, put the cat in a carrier and go to your veterinarian or nearest emergency veterinary hospital. Transporting a cat in a carrier, especially a panicked one, is always safer for both of you than wrapping it up in a towel. If you don't own a carrier, purchase one before an emergency happens!

Now, what has happened...Unlike dogs, cats seldom "slip a disc" in their back to cause paralysis. Rather they have a sort of a stroke. Many cats can have what is called "occult heart disease", meaning they have heart disease but show no signs of it. Heart disease in cats is very different from heart disease in dogs, and even in people. Cat with heart disease frequently develop blood clots in the left side of their heart where they break off and travel out into the body. In cats, these clots go down the aorta (the large artery that delivers blood to the body) and lodge where it divides to take blood to the hind legs. When a clot lodges here, there is no blood going to the cat's back legs and he can no longer walk. Because the clot is lodged at this split, it is called a "saddle thrombus" because it is sitting there like on a saddle and thrombus means "clot" in latin.

Initially this is very painful, much like the pain of pins and needles you feel when your arm goes to sleep. This makes the cat very stressed and can make its heart beat harder and faster. Because these cats have heart disease, this is very bad on the already sick heart and can rapidly put the cat into heart failure. The panting your cat is doing is partly due to the pain and stress but can also be due to the sudden heart failure it is experiencing.

Emergency treatment is directed at calming the cat, usually with sedatives and pain killers, and providing supplemental oxygen. It is imperative to not stress the cat any more than is possible so additional tests such as x-rays and sonograms of the heart may be postponed.

Because heart failure frequently accompanies the saddle thrombus, some cats may not recover. Your veterinarian will discuss your cat's prognosis and any possible treatments with you.

See

<http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&S=0&C=0&A=2507&EVetID=900000090> and

<http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&S=0&C=0&A=2420&EVetID=900000090> for more information on heart disease in cats.