

# Your Cat &

FELINE ASTHMA AND CHRONIC BRONCHITIS



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This leaflet has been produced collaboratively with the Feline Advisory Bureau.

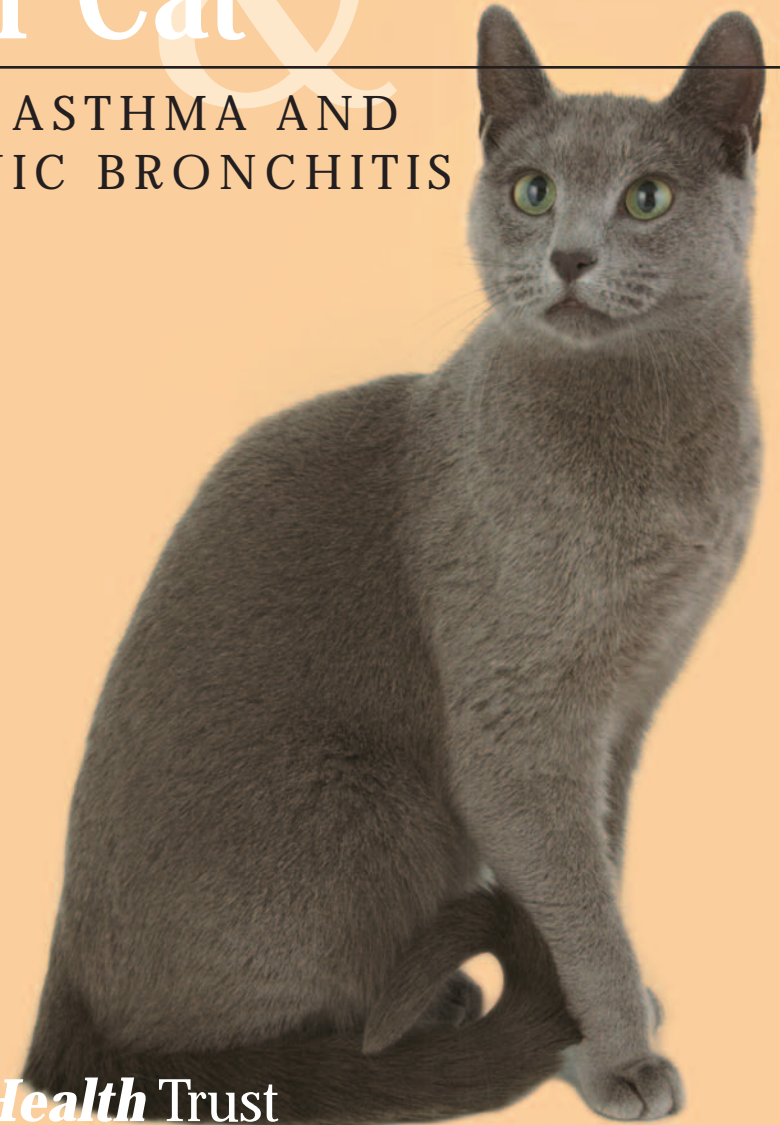
The Feline Advisory Bureau is a charity dedicated to the health and welfare of cats.

For further information please log-on to:  
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Animal *Health* Trust

*the science behind animal welfare*

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## FELINE ASTHMA AND CHRONIC BRONCHITIS

Cats are commonly affected by a condition that causes wheezing and coughing. Affected cats have inflammation in the small air passages in their lungs and the condition is variously described as chronic bronchitis, allergic airway disease, allergic bronchitis and asthma. Although some cases have strong similarities to human asthma, it is not certain whether most affected cats have a form of chronic bronchitis or true asthma. Chronic bronchitis results from breathing in small irritant particles (such as pollens, cigarette smoke, dust and household cleaning sprays). In asthma, the small airways are 'hyper-reactive' and respond excessively to normal stimuli resulting in contraction of the muscles around the small airways (causing them to narrow) and stimulating the secretion of mucous, which results in the signs of wheezing and coughing. The same signs are seen with both chronic bronchitis and asthma.

### Can any cats develop the condition?

Cats of any age, breed or sex can develop chronic bronchial disease. However, young to middle aged cats are most frequently affected, and Siamese/Oriental cats appear to be particularly predisposed.

### What clinical signs do cats show?

The most common signs in affected cats are chronic coughing and/or wheezing, with laboured or more rapid breathing being noticed in some. The signs may be persistent, or intermittent, and vary in their severity. Some cats develop a sudden onset of severely laboured breathing, probably due to a severe 'asthmatic attack'.

### How is it diagnosed?

The clinical signs (coughing and wheezing) may suggest chronic bronchial disease is present, but other diseases can also cause these signs, such as infections (lungworm, bacterial or viral infections), heart disease, tumours and even inhaled material such as grass seeds. These other diseases need to be eliminated before a diagnosis of chronic bronchial disease can be made. Investigations usually include blood tests, radiographs (x-rays), and often bronchoscopy (passing a small camera into the larger airways) and collecting airway washings (bronchial washings or broncholaveolar lavage). These tests help to rule out other diseases and changes typical of small airway inflammation may be found.

In people, lung function tests are used routinely to help diagnose and differentiate asthma from chronic bronchitis. Although potentially very helpful, most of these tests are not applicable to cats. However, some specialist centres such as the Animal Health Trust are developing new techniques that are proving valuable in diagnosing disease in cats.

### How is small airway disease treated?

The cause of most cases of chronic bronchial disease in cats is not known (although many are assumed to be asthma) and a combination of anti-inflammatory drugs (usually corticosteroids) and bronchodilators (used to relax the muscles around the small airways to allow them to dilate and allow easier airflow) is commonly used.

### Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids are potent anti-inflammatories used routinely to reduce airway inflammation. Tablets (given by mouth) have been used most commonly in the past (eg prednisolone tablets), although injectable steroids can be used in severe cases, and long-acting injections can be used if giving tablets is difficult. More recently inhaled therapy has been used (see below).

### Bronchodilators

Bronchodilators are usually used in conjunction with corticosteroids, and can be administered orally (tablets/capsules), by injection or by inhalation. Many cats benefit from the combined use of these drugs.

### Reducing exposure to irritants

Although in many cats it is assumed that the disease is caused by an allergic reaction, it is unusual to be able to identify a specific trigger for the disease. However, some actions can be taken in the home that may help reduce the severity of the signs, such as avoidance of smoking and the use of household sprays around the cat, and using a low dust type of cat litter.

### Inhaled therapy for cats

Inhalation drugs are the main form of therapy for human asthmatics and can also be used in cats, although a special 'spacer' device has to be used to enable cats to breathe in the drugs, just as used in human infants (see also: [www.aerokat.com](http://www.aerokat.com)). Using a spacer with a face mask, cats can inhale the drugs while breathing through the mask for 10-20 seconds and treatment is usually given twice daily. With most cats, this is actually easier than administering tablets.

