

Bladder Health and the Dalmatian Dog

Caring for the clinical/symptomatic urinary crystal and stone forming dog

Most crystal and stone-forming Dalmatians live out their lives uneventfully, without any symptoms or signs of a problem as crystals and small stones are passed when the dog urinates. For some dogs, larger stones form in the bladder creating the possibility of a urinary blockage. If your Dalmatian has been diagnosed with urate crystals/stones and is experiencing a clinical expression of this condition (a weak urine stream or difficulty urinating, urine that appears blood tinged especially when the bladder is almost empty, inability to urinate) a diet change along with increased hydration and close monitoring is needed.

Feed a diet that does not contain meat and other food sources high in purines.

Switch to a therapeutic “prescription” diet that is low in purines and avoids acidifying ingredients and supplements. A few good choices are: **Royal Canin Urinary UC Low Purine**, an egg-based kibble and **Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets HA Hydrolyzed**, a soy-based kibble. If your dog has trouble tolerating either of these diets (allergy, stomach upset, etc.) consult with a board-certified veterinarian nutritionist- a veterinarian who specializes in pet nutrition. A nutritionist will be able to recommend the best possible diet (commercial or home cooked) for your individual dog. More information about veterinarian nutritionists and what they do is available on the American College of Veterinary Medicine website <https://acvn.org/nutrition-consults/> The Clinical Nutrition Practice at Tufts University’s Cummings Veterinary Medical Center in Grafton MA is a good resource <http://vetnutrition.tufts.edu/>. Appointments can be scheduled for in-person or via-phone consultations.

Treats should be meat free. Cheese, hard boiled egg, fruits/vegetables (blueberries, strawberries, bananas, green beans, carrots, cucumbers, sweet red pepper, etc.) **avoid broccoli, asparagus, spinach and parsley**, commercial cheese or peanut butter treats or vegetarian biscuits that **do not contain brewer’s yeast** are a good choice.

Increase your Dalmatian's water intake

Stone formation occurs in concentrated, stagnant urine. **Dilute urine (urine specific gravity (USG) < 1.020) and the opportunity to frequently empty the bladder will reduce the risk of stone formation.** Soak kibble in water before feeding and add more water to it when serving. Always have plenty of fresh water available. Short intense exercise sessions like sprinting to chase/retrieve a toy will encourage water consumption. You can also make hydration more enticing by offering flavored water:

- Boil 2 cups of water, turn off heat, add 1 raw scrambled egg, stir to cook egg, let cool and offer in ½ cup portions.
- Add .5-1 oz. of full fat goat milk or light cream to 2 cups of warm water offered in ½ cup portions.

Monitor your Dalmatian's Condition

Regular monitoring of your dog's condition will help you avoid and quickly address any complications that may occur. **Urate stones are less likely to form in alkaline urine- pH ~ 7.0** Urine test strips (for pets or humans) that include a parameter for pH are readily available and an easy way to monitor urine acidity at home. Nearly colorless urine is a good indication your Dalmatian is getting enough water. A more accurate measurement of hydration can be determined at home with a urine sample (first of the morning) using a refractometer (a hand-held device that measures USG, readily available and affordable). A Urinalysis (from a first of the morning urine sample brought to your veterinarian) can provide a complete assessment and should be done on a regular basis- every 3 months initially. If a urinalysis shows crystals present in the urine, your veterinarian may perform an ultrasound of the bladder to see if crystals are starting to clump together. Some dogs require both dietary and medical management. Certain medications like Allopurinol- an acid reducer, can prevent crystal formation and may help to break up any existing crystals.