

Feline Acne

Acne is a skin disease of cats that primarily affects the chin. Most owners present their cats to the veterinarian for evaluation of a “dirty chin.”

Prevalence

Acne is a fairly common skin disorder of the cat. It is not confined to a particular age grouping and may occur in a cat of any age. Lesions are most often on the chin and lower lip. Sometimes, the upper lip may also be involved. Without close examination, the cat may appear to have a dirty chin. It is more difficult to see the lesions if the cat has a dark haircoat.

The typical lesion is a comedone (“blackhead”) and, occasionally, superficial pimples are seen. With progressive involvement, the hair follicle may become plugged with secretions and rupture into deep layers of the skin. If this happens, the chin becomes swollen and very angry in appearance. The cat becomes sensitive and resists touching and treatment.

Causes/Transmission

The cause of feline acne remains unknown; realistically, it is likely that there are multiple causes. Some of the possible causes include poor grooming habits, or clogging of the hair follicles when hair is not properly shed. Also, animals may have an allergy to the plastics commonly found in plastic drinking bowls, or an allergy to bacteria when drinking and food bowls are not cleaned regularly. The veterinarian will often recommend changing all pet bowls to sealed ceramic, glass or metal.

Treatment

Topical treatment is usually adequate for most cases of acne; severe cases may require systemic (oral) therapy.

Treatment begins with clipping of the chin. This permits deep cleaning of plugged follicles and application of medication to the lesions. Because the cat's chin may be rather sensitive, sedation may be required to accomplish adequate clipping and initial cleaning.

Treatment is continued at home. The pores of the skin are opened with the application of heat. A washcloth is placed under hot water, and the excess water squeezed out. This hot pack is placed on the chin for 2-4 minutes. When it is removed, the chin is cleansed with a medicated shampoo. There are several effective medications available, and their choice is partially determined by the presence of absence of infection.

If infection is present, antibiotics or antifungal drugs may be given orally.

Prognosis

Acne will recur in many cats. At the first sign of return, begin hot packing the chin and cleansing with the medicated shampoo. If this does not control the problem, your cat needs to be re-examined by your veterinarian