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Cats get acne? They do

You don't have to have a teenage cat to be faced with clogged pores, blackheads and pustules! Feline acne is a fairly common problem that affects cats of all ages.



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THE CAT DOC

Owners often look at me incredulously when I diagnose their cat with this condition. "My cat is too old to have acne!" or "All he eats is cat food," are typical owner replies. Just as in most cases of human acne, the causes of feline acne are numerous. Diet, hormones, allergies, bacteria, fungus, skin mites and cleanliness can all play roles.

Classic feline acne occurs on the chin and lips as blackheads and whiteheads. It does not spread to other parts of the body. These clogged pores can become infected by bacteria, then develop into pimples and pustules. Pustules can burst and drain, or enlarge and cause discomfort. Most acne looks worse to the owner than it feels to the cat.

If you think your cat has acne, you should consult with your veterinarian. How acne is treated depends on the severity of the

infection and the amount of swelling present. Testing is often needed to determine what is causing the acne. A Wood's lamp test and culture show if fungus is present. A skin scrape can reveal if skin mites are a problem. An impression smear can determine if bacteria or yeast are present in the sores. In severe cases, a skin biopsy might be needed to get to the bottom of the cause.

A topical reaction to plastic food and water bowls has been implicated as a cause. Changing to glass, ceramic or stainless steel helps some cats. Oily food residue buildup on the edges of food and water bowls also contributes to acne. A kitty's chin comes in continual contact with bowls, so it makes sense that an oily buildup could contribute to clogging pores. Proper daily washing and drying of bowls helps this. Feeding on disposable paper plates alone had cured some of my patient's acne.

In mild cases of acne, blackheads and minor inflammation, I initially recommend thorough, daily cleaning of the animal's chin with hydrogen peroxide. This will help open up the pores, remove the blackheads, and clean out oils from the hair follicles. When more pronounced inflammation and infection

are present, hair shaving and medicated scrubs are needed. Sometimes prescription creams are recommended. When deep pustules and pimples are present, oral antibiotics are needed for 10-60 days.

Corticosteroids are useful in relieving inflammation and decreasing fatty secretions in the skin in some cases, but if deep infection is present, corticosteroids can make the infections worse. Hot packing swollen chins reduces inflammation and is tolerated by most cats.

If you have multiple cats with feline acne lesions, start cleaning the affected skin and food and water bowls. When multiple cats are affected, type of diet and feeding hygiene practices must be evaluated because acne is not a contagious condition. Changing the diet solves some cases of acne, and it is best to avoid fish or seafood.

Most cases of feline acne are easily treated and not a big problem. Acne lesions that do not respond to conventional treatment should be biopsied and cultured. In tough cases a veterinary dermatologist may need to be consulted. Don't let your kitty's zits get out of hand!

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