

Feline Acne - Causes, Diagnosis, and Treatment

Not only is acne a common skin disorder in humans, it is also a relatively prevalent disorder found among felines, regardless of age or gender. Acne in cats mostly occurs on their chins or lower lips, and cat owners generally present their pets to the veterinarian with the primary complaint of their cat's mouth looking "dirty." Feline acne, a disorder of follicular keratinization, is not very well understood, and information related to this disorder is limited. However, it is useful to understand as much as possible about feline acne so that veterinarians can treat these patients as efficiently and as quickly as possible.



While the exact pathogenesis of feline acne is unknown, scientists and veterinarians speculate that this acne could appear for a number of reasons, such as poor grooming habits, stress, immunosuppression, contact allergies, and chin trauma. If a cat does not groom well, there can be a build-up of

foreign substances on the chin, causing irritation and clogging the pores. The opposite can also be a cause, where the feline over-grooms, and the chin is irritated from rubbing fur repeatedly. There has also been evidence that some felines have allergies to certain plastic food bowls and the rubbing of their mouths against the bowls can cause this disorder to occur. The first signs of feline acne that generally appear are comedones and crusts on the affected area. Cases can range from simple comedones on the chin/lower lip to more severe folliculitis or even edematous swelling. In the more severe situations, this can cause pruritus, making the cat scratch the area and potentially opening up the area to more infection. Nodules, hair loss, pustules, bleeding, and extreme redness are all signs that the feline may need to be treated for acne.

Diagnosis of this disorder can be tricky because of the inability to automatically pinpoint the cause. Before treating the feline, many other possibilities need to be ruled out.

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Along with a physical exam of the clinical signs, blood tests, urine tests, and skin cultures may need to be completed to detect more serious conditions or allergies. Demodicosis, dermatophytosis, and eosinophilic granuloma are all differential diagnoses that have similar signs and symptoms as feline acne and need to be checked for before moving forward with treatment. In cases that are more difficult to diagnose, cell biopsies may be necessary. If tests result in the detection of an underlying allergy, flea medicine and alteration of diet/food vessels should be suggested to prevent the allergies from reappearing.



Once the feline has been diagnosed, there are different types of treatment that can be utilized to improve the condition. If only asymptomatic comedones are present, the feline would benefit from a daily cleanse of the affected area with a medicated antibacterial wipe and if a plastic food bowl is used, a change to a stainless-steel feeding bowl that is washed daily. If the feline is suffering from more severe conditions, such as folliculitis, prolonged antibiotic medications should be prescribed to treat deep pyoderma. Amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, cephalixin, metronidazole, and clindamycin are the top recommended medications to administer to felines with more severe signs and symptoms. The medication should be taken for six to eight

weeks until all signs of the acne has been cleared for two weeks at minimum. The affected area should be washed every couple of days with an anti-seborrheic, benzoyl peroxide containing shampoo, and the area should be wiped daily with wipes such as Malacetic® wet wipes. Topical mupirocin can also be helpful, and it can be applied to the area every twelve hours. In cases that are more difficult to control or return often, topical human acne treatments such as Retin-A, Benzamycin® gel, and Metrogel® can be prescribed for use once or twice daily, depending on severity. It is also recommended that a supplement containing Omega-3 and Omega-6 is administered to help normalize keratin and reduce inflammation. In the most extreme cases where acne is not responding to the topical or oral treatments, the last resort should be prescribing isotretinoin. The success rate is only about 33% when using this medication, but if all other courses of action fail, this drug should be considered to help cure the condition. Close monitoring and regular checkups should be required so that the feline can be reevaluated often to ensure it is receiving the best treatment possible for its condition.

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