

Feline Acne / Chin Acne

What is feline acne?

Feline chin acne is a common but poorly understood disorder of follicular keratinization. Keratinization refers to the overproduction of keratin, a protein found in the outer layer of skin. If this excess keratin is trapped in the hair follicle, comedones or "blackheads" form. Pustules or "pimples" may form secondary to the blackheads. Feline chin acne is similar to the acne that humans get.

What causes chin acne?

While the exact mechanism is not understood theories include: excessive sebum production (the natural oily "moisturizer" produced by the skin,) poor grooming habits, and allergic reactions to plastic feeding dishes as there does seem to be an association between using plastic food dishes and chin acne. Whatever the cause, the result is that the hair follicle becomes "plugged" and an infection with its accompanying clinical signs results.

What are the clinical signs of chin acne?

The most common clinical sign associated with chin acne is the "dirty" black appearance of the chin. The lesions may appear on the chin, the lower lip and/or the upper lip. Careful observation will reveal the "blackheads" and infected follicles. Chronic cases may have hard, crusty lesions that are sore when touched. Both male and female cats can develop chin acne.

How is chin acne diagnosed?

This diagnosis can be made based on history and clinical findings on exam. Occasionally further testing may be required if the lesions do not have a typical appearance or if the lesions do not respond to the standard treatment.

How is feline chin acne treated?

Moderate to severe cases will require oral antibiotics. All cats with acne should have their chins gently cleansed daily with or human facial acne pads or antiseborrheic shampoo or cleanser. Clipping the hair around the acne will help keep the area clean, if the cat will allow it.

Some affected cats benefit from a fatty acid supplement, especially Omega 3 fatty acids.

In cats that are fed on plastic food dishes they should be changed to ceramic, glass, or stainless steel. In many cases this in itself will cure the condition.

What is the prognosis for a cat diagnosed with chin acne?

Most cases respond well to improved hygiene or to a simple change in food dishes. Owners should closely follow their veterinarian's instructions to ensure success. Refractory cases may require aggressive treatment to control the problem.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM