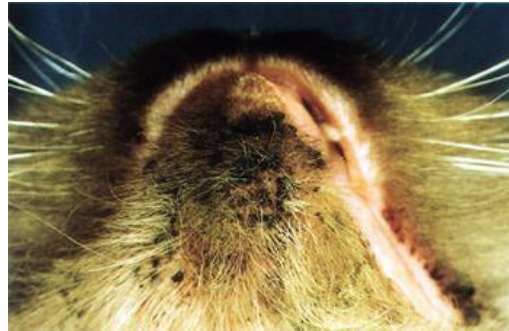


FELINE ACNE

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Have you ever noticed that your cat has what appears to be “black dirt” underneath his or her chin? Or that this dirt has progressed in to pimple-like lesions and is bothering your cat? Feline acne is a disease that is quite common in cats, and signs of the problem range from blocked hair follicles causing blackheads under the chin (causing the “black dirt”) to infection of the already blocked hair follicles, causing swollen red, pus-filled pimples that can be very painful. In severe cases, infection of the area can become so bad that the whole chin is swollen and painful to the touch and affected cats may become grouchy and unsociable. The upper lip can also become involved.



Feline acne is similar to human acne in that the exact cause is not known, although there are a number of theories. These include being stressed or having an immune system that is not working one hundred percent; not grooming properly; over-production of sebum, a natural oil produced by the follicles; and allergies. Unlike humans, the disease is not restricted to younger cats; in fact, any cat of any breed or age and either sex is at equal risk of being affected by this debilitating problem. Similarly, whether your cat is desexed or entire does not affect the likelihood of the disease occurring.

Once follicles have become blocked, they are then at risk of becoming invaded by bacteria and yeasts (fungi), many of which normally live on healthy skin. These organisms can take advantage of the compromised state of the skin and grow in large numbers in the disrupted follicles, causing infection, swelling and pain. The skin becomes increasingly red-raw and develops areas of pus, crusty scabbing and hair-loss.



Luckier cats may only suffer a once-off episode of acne that is resolved with appropriate treatment, however for the majority of cats feline acne is a problem that occurs on and off (or remains a continuous problem) throughout life. In mild cases with only a small number of blackheads, treatment consists of a simple anti-bacterial and/or anti-yeast wash to prevent infection and to unblock the follicles (remove the blackheads). Ointments that kill bacteria and yeasts are also indicated at this time to prevent the acne from becoming any worse. In cats that are prone to recurring acne, a once-weekly wash can be used to keep the infection at bay. In severe cases, systemic (oral) anti-bacterial and anti-fungal medication must be used to treat any secondary infection. Oral treatment is combined with surface treatment of the affected areas using anti-fungal cleaning wipes and antibiotic/anti-fungal ointments. Often in cats with acne-infected skin that is too painful to touch, oral medications are administered first until the swelling and pain is reduced enough to allow application of treatment directly to the chin.

Careful monitoring post-infection is important, with local treatment of the skin implemented at the earliest sign of blackheads. Weekly washing of the chin with an anti-fungal shampoo helps prevent relapses, as does cleaning the chin after eating if your cat is a messy eater. Despite only a small amount of the skin being affected, infection can be quite savage and debilitating, and is always worth treating. If you are worried that your cat may have feline acne or want to ask any questions, you can contact us at the clinic on 9739 0500.