



CAYMAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Cat Abscess

Abscesses in cats are serious conditions. Unlike abscesses in humans and dogs, for example, they function deep below the skin and, like the legendary iceberg, this unseen portion does most of the damage. An abscess in a cat is not "just an abscess" as so many people offhandedly observe. It is a condition which requires medical attention and antibiotic therapy.

Despite the great natural resistance of cats to infection, abscesses are common and are caused by a break in the skin through which bacteria enter. All cats carry lethal bacteria in their mouths and these bacteria cause the vast majority of cat abscesses when they are left behind in a bite wound.



Bite wounds from fighting are the most common causes of cat abscesses. Young male cats often suffer from abscesses at the base of the tail. This location usually denotes a bite wound inflicted by a mature tomcat who has been defending his "territory" by attempting to bite off the testicles of inexperienced competitors. Mouth abscesses, especially in older cats, often come from lack of dental care.

The most common symptoms of an abscess are heat and swelling of the skin at the site of the infection. The owner can usually feel a soft lump at this location and it often is obvious from the cat's reaction that the area is painful. The cat's temperature rises, and he or she may refuse to eat. Often, the original bite wound can be seen.

Neglected abscesses may extend into the deeper body tissues, unnoticed by the cat's owner. The infection can enter the bloodstream causing a septicemia (blood poisoning) with subsequent damage to the heart, kidneys and other vital organs. Sometimes this damage can be detected clinically; however, it is usually not detected until later in the cat's life. It can also shorten the animal's lifespan by several years. Sometimes, such septicemias become overwhelming and actually cause the cat's death at the time of the abscess. Bite wounds in the tail or the limbs may set up a



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bone infection, necessitating amputation unless early treatment is initiated. Bone infections are extremely difficult to treat. Ear abscesses often spread to the brain causing convulsions and a slow, painful death.



Cat Recovering from Extensive Bite Wound Abscess

Abscess wounds on the flanks, or other areas where the skin is loose, may lead to what is called cellulitis. Instead of localizing in one lump, the infection spreads under the skin throughout the loose tissues. Very often, the cat is extremely toxic (suffering the effects of blood poisoning) and requires extensive medical treatment. If this infection is near the spinal column, it may even enter the spinal cord and lead to complex nerve damage. Advanced cellulitis can even kill a cat.

Treatment

Many cat abscesses break down, discharge a considerable volume of pus, then appear to heal spontaneously, only to flare up again. This recurrence is due to the unique tendency of a cat's skin to heal more rapidly than the tissues it covers. Since the skin has healed and the deep-seated infection has not drained adequately the infection returns.

Proper medical care of a cat's abscess involves local surgery (wide excision, debridement and drainage) in order to remove the deep infection, allow drainage, and promote complete healing. This must also be accompanied by supportive antibiotic therapy. Abscesses that are draining satisfactorily may only require antibiotic therapy.

Following surgery, three to 10 days of continued treatment and observation are usually required. The period may be longer if complications are involved. Following veterinary hospital discharge of the cat, the owner should notice an improvement in the cat's health. If there are any signs of an abscess re-forming, the cat should be brought back immediately for further treatment.

Modern veterinary medicine ... Old fashioned care