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Chin Acne in Cats

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What is chin acne?

Feline chin acne is a 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 if bacteria infect the comedones. Feline chin acne is similar to the acne that humans get.

What causes chin acne?

While the exact mechanism is not understood, the abnormal follicular keratinization is thought to be related to a primary seborrheic disease such as *seborrhea oleosa*, to *excessive sebum production* (the natural oily "moisturizer" produced by the skin) or to *poor grooming habits*. Interestingly, in a significant number of cats, there is an association between using colored 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" 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?

Diagnosis is based on medical history and clinical signs. Occasionally, blood and urine tests and skin culture and sensitivity tests are required. If the lesions do not have a typical appearance, biopsies or skin scrapings may be recommended to rule out neoplasia or cancer.

How is feline chin acne treated?

"Affected cats often benefit from a fatty acid supplement."

Treatment often involves improved hygiene. A benzoyl peroxide facial preparation or an antiseborrheic shampoo is used to cleanse the affected area and flush out the hair follicles. Affected cats often benefit from a fatty acid supplement, especially Omega 3 fatty acids. In some cases, it may be necessary to keep the hair clipped short. Oral antibiotics or isotretinoin may be used in more severe or chronic cases.

In cats that are fed on colored plastic food dishes, if the food dishes are changed to ceramic, glass, or stainless steel, the condition may resolve without other treatment.



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.