

Walker Veterinary Hospital

Melanie S. Walker, D.V.M.

38111 US 290

Waller, TX 77484

Telephone (936)931-2244

www.walkervethospital.com



CHIN ACNE IN CATS

What is chin acne?

Feline chin acne is a poorly understood disorder of follicular keratinization. Follicular keratinization refers to the overproduction of keratin, a protein found in the outer layer of skin. When this excess keratin is trapped in the hair follicle, comedones or “blackheads” form. These comedones may become infected with bacteria and form pustules or “pimples”. 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 poor grooming or cleaning, or to excessive sebum production (the natural oily “moisturizer” produced by the skin). The end result is that the hair follicle becomes “plugged” and an infection with its accompanying clinical signs often 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. Some people refer to this condition as “dirty chin syndrome” for that reason. The lesions, pustules and comedones, may appear on the chin, lower lip and/or the upper lip. The chin often appears dark and flaky. 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 will be performed. In cases that are suspected of having a neoplastic (tumor) origin, biopsies or skin scrapings may be recommended.



How is feline chin acne treated?

Treatment often involves improved hygiene. Cleaning with benzoyl peroxide facial preparations is often advised. Antiseborrheic shampoos and clipping of the hair are often recommended. Antibiotics, fatty acid supplements or oral isotretinoin may be used in more severe or chronic cases.

In a significant number of cats, there is an association between using colored plastic food dishes and chin acne. In these cats, if the food dishes are changed to ceramic, glass, or stainless steel, the condition resolves.

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

Most cases respond well to improved hygiene. Owners should closely follow their veterinarian's instructions to ensure success. Refractory cases will often benefit from medications and more aggressive treatments.

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