

Cat bite abscesses

Overview

Has your cat been in a fight with another cat? A cat's claws and teeth are covered in bacteria, if they bite or scratch each other it's very likely that an infection will develop. This very often leads to an abscess forming under the skin.

The most common areas for a cat to be bitten include:

- Top of the head
- Tail
- Legs
- Face and neck



A burst cat bite abscess on a cat's face

Cat bite abscesses cause pain, sometimes a high temperature and often make a cat feel very unwell. They usually respond quickly to veterinary treatment but can put a cat at risk of catching certain diseases.

Cat bites and scratches can also cause serious infections in people. Always seek medical advice from your doctor if you have been bitten or scratched by a cat.

Neutering is the best way to prevent fights and cat bite abscesses.

Symptoms

It usually takes two to four days for an abscess to develop after a fight. Signs of an infection often come before the abscess shows, these include:

- Not eating or eating less than usual
- Low energy (lethargy)
- Fever (feeling hot to touch)
- Symptoms of an abscess include:
 - Swelling, redness and heat in the area
 - Wounds (usually two small punctures, or a large wound if the abscess has opened up)
 - Floppy tail – if the tail has been bitten



Cat bite wound on a cat's head

- Limping – your cat may even not want to put the leg down at all
- Pain (being quiet, aggressive, licking at one particular area a lot, growling, twitching, or not letting you near them)

Causes

Cats naturally have lots of nasty bacteria living in their mouths and in their claws. When they bite or scratch, these bacteria get pushed into the wound deep below the skin. Infections develop and very often lead to an abscess.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your cat shows any of the signs above or if you are worried that they may have been fighting.

You know your cat best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Is your cat is neutered? Speak to your vet about neutering your cat – it is the best way to prevent fights and cat bite abscesses.

Treatment

Your cat will need to be seen by your vet who will assess the abscess and treat it in the veterinary hospital if necessary. They may also prescribe some medication for you to give to your cat at home:

Anti-inflammatory pain relief

- Anti-inflammatory pain relief is excellent at reducing pain and inflammation.

Antibiotics

- Antibiotics aren't always necessary. Your vet will advise.

Cleaning the wound

- Your vet may ask you to keep your cat's wound clean at home by bathing it. The vet might give you a special antiseptic or ask you to use salt water. Usually, twice daily is sufficient.
- To make salt water, add 1 teaspoon of salt to a pint of boiled, cooled water.



Outlook

If cat bite abscesses are treated by a vet and kept clean they usually heal within a week or two without causing any ongoing problems. Contact your vet if the abscess isn't improving or you are worried. Left without treatment, cat bite abscesses have the potential to cause ongoing issues.

Although it is rare, cat bites can spread diseases such as:

- Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)
- Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV)

It is very important to keep your cat up to date with vaccination.

Preventing cat fights

- Read our guide on preventing cat fights.
- Neuter your cat to reduce the chance of them fighting.



Are cat bites and scratches dangerous to people?

Yes, cat bites and scratches can cause serious infections in humans if they break the skin. Seek advice from your doctor as soon as possible if you have been bitten or scratched by a cat.

Published: July 2018