

Squamous Cell Carcinoma Cats

Overview

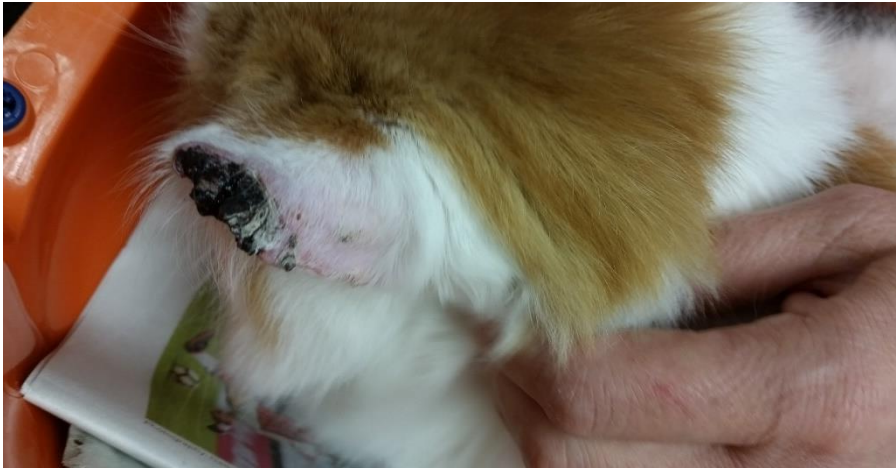
- Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is a skin cancer caused by sunlight damage.
- It's most common on the ear tips, nose and eyelids.
- White cats are susceptible to sunburn and 13 times more likely to develop a SCC than darker coloured cats.
- SCC is more common in cats over five years old.
- It often starts as a crusty patch that looks like a wound or scratch.
- SCC often affects more than one site (i.e. ears and nose) but it doesn't usually spread to the rest of the body.
- The best way to treat SCC is by removal or radiotherapy.
- Prevention is better than cure – read how to prevent your cat getting sunburnt below.

What is a squamous cell carcinoma?

Squamous cell carcinoma is a skin cancer. It can affect any part of your cat's skin but is most likely to develop on their ears, nose or eyelids (hairless areas with little protection from sunlight).

SCC is much more common in white cats, ginger cats and those with light coloured skin because their skin is more vulnerable to UV-light. SCC develops over a period of months to years, so is much more likely to affect an older cat (usually over five years of age).

Fortunately, SCC is often very slow to metastasize (spread) around the rest of the body.



'Kitty' has squamous cell carcinomas on both ear tips – these are obvious lesions, they are often much smaller than this.

Symptoms

- Often develop on the ears, nose or eyelids
- Scabs
- Small, black, crusty patches of skin
- Weepy, raw looking skin
- Red, raised areas of skin
- Non-healing wounds or ulcerated areas
- SCC patches tend to get worse in the summer and improve in the winter
- Nearly half of cats diagnosed with SCC have more than one cancer lesion – look carefully for others.

Causes

Squamous cell carcinoma is most commonly caused by UV-light – it damages cells and can lead to cancer.

Treatment options

Your cat's treatment will depend on where their cancer is, how big it is, and whether it has spread around the body. Treatment is always easier if the cancer is small, caught early, and hasn't spread around the body.

Surgery

If your cat's cancer is small and in a location that is easy to operate on, it may be possible for your vet to remove it. If your cat's cancer is large, or in an area difficult to operate on, removal may not be an option.

Tumours on the nose and eyelids are usually more difficult to remove than tumours on the ears. If your cat has SCC on his/her ear tip(s), your vet may recommend removing part, or all of their ear— this operation is called a pinnectomy. The idea of removing the ears can take some getting used to, but it can cure the



Bobby is recovering well from an operation to remove cancer on both of his ears.

problem if the ears are the only area affected – and they won't lose their hearing.

Cryosurgery

Cryosurgery is when extreme cold is used to freeze and kill cancer cells – useful when a cancer can't be removed because it sits in an awkward place.

Specialist referral

Your vet may decide to refer your cat to a specialist if their cancer is large or in an area that is difficult to treat. A specialist vet may decide to use other techniques such as radiotherapy, photodynamic therapy or a combination of any of the above therapies.

Medication

There isn't a medicine that specifically treats SCC. To help with symptoms, your vet may decide to prescribe pain relief, anti-inflammatory medicine and, in some cases, antibiotics.

Ongoing care and outlook

It's likely your cat will recover well if their cancer is caught early and can be removed completely. Unfortunately, it may regrow if it can't be removed completely.

New cancers might not always be visible to the naked eye, so it's important to keep checking your cat, even after treatment. There is a chance your cat could develop another SCC later in life, so keep checking them and make sure they stay protected from the sun to prevent more cancers forming.

If your cat has a large cancer that can't be treated you will need to monitor them closely to make sure they stay comfortable and receive the care they need. If your cat's cancer is affecting their quality of life, it may be necessary to consider the difficult decision to put them to sleep.

Prevention

Protect your cat's exposed skin by applying a waterproof sunblock (factor 30 or above) every day. Alternatively, protect your cat from intense sunlight by keeping them inside, especially around the middle of the day.

SCC in the mouth

There is a type of squamous cell carcinoma that can develop inside the mouth. Unfortunately, this is a particularly aggressive type of cancer that often spreads to the bones of the face. Treatment can be difficult, and involve major surgery. It's important to consider your cat's quality of life when weighing up what to do. If their quality of life isn't good, it may be necessary to consider putting your cat to sleep. Speak to your vet for more advice.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet for an appointment if you notice anything wrong with your cat's skin. The sooner you have your cat diagnosed, the higher their chance of successful treatment and recovery.

You know your cat best. If you are concerned, it's always best to contact your vet.

Cost

Treatment for squamous cell carcinomas can become very expensive. Consider insuring your cat as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

It's also very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your cat. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then the vet may be able to offer another.

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