



“Are those blackheads on my cat’s chin?”

A quick guide to feline acne: Causes, signs, diagnosis and treatment

Definition

Chin acne is a disorder in which excess oily material (sebum) is formed by glands in the skin of the chin. This sebum, along with dead skin cells, clogs hair follicles, causing irritation, raised red bumps, abscesses and the characteristic black greasy material (i.e., blackheads). Secondary bacterial infection usually complicates treatment. Individual cats may be at higher risk if their skin glands overproduce sebum.

Causes

Acne is a disorder that can be confused with other types of dermatitis affecting the skin, including parasitic and fungal infections. While the exact origin of feline acne remains unknown, several factors have been identified as possible causes, including:

- > Suppressed immune system
- > Stress
- > Poor hygiene
- > Chin trauma (e.g., excessive chin rubbing on objects to mark scent or chin scratching due to food or environmental allergies)
- > Allergy to plastic food dish
- > Bacterial contamination from rubbing chin in food
- > Viruses (e.g., calicivirus, herpes)
- > Seborrheic dermatitis (skin condition that can cause scaly patches and redness)
- > Food allergy
- > Inhalant allergy

Signs

Early signs of feline acne include the formation of blackheads on the chin and lower lip, causing your cat’s chin to appear “dirty.” Crusts may also form. Some cats stay in this stage. But in others, the hair follicles can become irritated and infected, causing itchy, red, puss-filled bumps and cysts to form. Cats with severe cases of feline acne sometimes develop cellulitis, a bacterial skin infection that can cause painful swelling in the chin and lips.

Diagnosis

Your veterinarian may perform a skin scraping to rule out demodicosis (a type of mange) and check for fungus. In severe and persistent cases, your veterinarian may take a skin biopsy or perform a bacterial culture and sensitivity test.

Treatment

The treatment your veterinarian recommends will depend on the severity of the condition and how much it bothers both you and your cat. If your cat has only blackheads, no treatment is required. However, the cat may still benefit from a daily chin cleaning with an antibacterial wipe, changing to dry food and switching to a ceramic or stainless steel bowl. Cats with infected follicles, however, may need an oral antibiotic treatment and bacterial antibiotics and should have their chins washed with antibacterial shampoo once a day until the condition improves. Salicylic acid wipes for teenage acne or a medicated shampoo can also be helpful.