Transcript

**Feline Stomatitis**

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we’re going to discuss feline stomatitis. *Stoma* is Latin for “mouth” and *itis* means “inflammation.” Feline stomatitis means inflammation of the mouth. Feline stomatitis is also called lymphocytic-plasmacytic stomatitis, feline chronic gingivostomatitis, immune-mediated feline refractory stomatitis, and feline generalized oral inflammatory disease. All of those titles mean the exact same thin. To cats, however, it really ends up meaning a very painful, very serious chronic oral disease that is thought to be autoimmune in nature.

The feline immune system seems to overreact to dental plaque around a cat’s teeth or tooth, triggering inflammation in the tissues of the mouth. You can also see inflammation on the back of the throat called the oral pharynx, and even underlying bone can become inflamed or infected. The inflammation appears externally in the mouth as angry, red, swollen tissue.

**How to Tell if Your Cat Has Stomatitis**

Stomatitis is often found in cats with diseases affecting their immune system, such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus as well. Gingivitis or gum disease is often present in kitties with this condition as well. There might be more of a tendency for certain breeds of cats like the Siamese to acquire stomatitis, as well as the domestic short hair cat.

There’s a juvenile onset form of this disease that develops in kittens between three and five months as permanent teeth erupt. By nine months of age, the problem is really significant. Needless to say, stomatitis causes severe pain for a cat. There are usually behavior changes that can include depression, irritability, aggression, and reclusiveness.

Excessive drooling is also common, and the gums can easily bleed. The condition is obviously painful, and many cats have trouble eating or actually just give up after they have tried for several days or weeks. It just becomes too painful and you’ll just say, “Well, maybe he’s just not wanting to eat as much,” when really it’s overwhelming pain that’s preventing the cat from eating.

A cat that’s really hungry that runs to her bowl and then is hesitant about putting food in her mouth is another good, potential symptom that your kitty could be suffering from feline stomatitis. Dehydration, as well as weight loss and muscle wasting, are also seen in cats with the disease because they’re just not eating as many calories as they need to maintain their body weight.

Bad breath and terrible, heinous breath – kitties that start off with kind of bad mouth odor that evolve into really terrible breath is another common symptom. This, as well as inadequate grooming, because the licking and grooming motion becomes very painful for these cats. A lot of kitties will also paw at their mouths. You’ll see them making more motion that their mouths could be irritated or inflamed.
Identifying Feline Stomatitis Through Proactive Living

Feline stomatitis is actually a perfect example of a medical condition that can be identified early through proactive living, and you can do this in one of two ways.

1. At-Home Wellness Exams

First, as most of you know I advocate at-home wellness exams, and this includes oral examinations. So, beginning at kittenhood, I recommend that you, the owner, begin identifying changes in your cat’s mouth and desensitizing your pet’s mouth to touch early on is really critical for you to be able to examine your adult cat’s mouths.

It’s important with kittens that you begin, as you’re petting their face, that you include touching lips or touching inside the mouth so that your cat doesn’t begin to have a meltdown in terms of what you’re doing at two, three, or four years of age. If you begin desensitizing the oral cavity of your kittens, it will be totally normal for them to have you peer in their mouths or pull back a gum to be able to do an adequate oral examination.

2. Six-Month Wellness Examination

Needless to say, if you cannot evaluate your cat’s mouth regularly at home, you must rely heavily on option number two, which means your cat’s six-month wellness examination at your veterinarian. A lot of changes can occur in your cat’s mouth in a six-month period of time. Foregoing an oral exam for a cat that is brewing a stomatitis issue makes all the difference in the world for your cat’s long-term quality of life.

The Most Effective Treatment for Feline Stomatitis

Feline stomatitis starts as gingivitis, which is a red line at the gums. Oftentimes when kitties get this disease, you’ll see the whole gum line become flaming red. There’s no plaque and tartar on the teeth yet that you can see, but the whole gum line is really, really red at the junction between the tooth and the gum. Commonly, there’s a ring of inflammation around the whole tooth, especially the back teeth. So, the premolars and the molars are most commonly affected.

In the juvenile onset form of stomatitis, which is hopefully when astute owners are catching this disease, some cats can respond to intensive medical management, which are really good oral home care, regular professional dental cleanings, as well as controlling plaque and tartar. Unfortunately, most of the time stomatitis is identified reactively, which means very late in the game. This usually happens when owners notice that the mouth odor coming from their kitty is absolutely horrendous or they see a change in eating habits, which results to a visit to the veterinarian.

At this point, when the whole mouth is swollen and there are areas of ulcerations on the roof of the mouth, tongue, lips, or throat, there are no consistently successful long-term management options at this point. Unfortunately, the kindest option for treatment is full mouth extraction of teeth. That means removing all of your cat’s teeth. Sound pretty aggressive? Because it is.
But this disease process is also very aggressive, and at this point, when you have full, degenerative disease going on in the cat’s mouth, without aggressive intervention, many cats actually stop eating and begin the dying process. Many cats with full mouth extractions experience dramatic relief and have a significantly improved quality of life after their teeth, which is the source of the inflammation and the infection, have been completely removed.

To avoid chronic complications from full mouth extractions, I believe that it’s very important that the procedure be done by an experienced veterinary dentist and an X-ray be taken afterward to make sure that all the tooth roots have been successfully removed from your cat’s mouth. Think of it as a similar situation to a periodontist preparing a mouth for dentures for people. Except, of course, cats do fine without the clumsy cosmetic appliances that are fitted afterward.

Other Methods to Treat Feline Stomatitis

The logical question that most of you are probably asking: “Aren’t there some kind of medical options or medications that can help control immune-mediated reactions instead of extracting teeth?” Unfortunately, most of the medical management options have been not widely successful for long-term control of feline stomatitis.

Traditional veterinarians have tried steroids, immunosuppressants, long-term antibiotic use, and laser therapy, as well as topical anesthetic options – all with kind of unimpressive long-term results. Not to mention that there are significant side effects with many of these drugs in many of these cases.

Most importantly, in my opinion, kitties are suffering from a tremendous amount of pain during the weeks to months it takes for some of these medications to kick in. Cats can have a tremendous amount of pain enough that they’re not eating. Actually, removing all the teeth and thereby the source of immune mediated reaction and infection in most cases is actually the most humane treatment in most of the cases of feline stomatitis.

Proactive Living for Feline Stomatitis Management

Thankfully, I do see my fair share of proactive owners that have identified these subtle changes in their cats’ mouths very early on, and I have had some good successes in treating mild to moderate cases of feline stomatitis non-surgically.

In my practice, I do a multimodal approach to stomatitis.

First, I address the diet, although food allergies have not been definitively linked to cause stomatitis. I absolutely see consistent improvement with the amount of oral inflammation when we eliminate all sources of potential allergens from a cat’s diet. This means that I transition cats off of foods that they have previously consumed. In most cases, this means eliminating poultry and seafood from the diet. I also discontinue all foods that are biologically unnecessary for cats. This means I stop all foods containing potato, rice, wheat, corn – all the carbohydrates. By feeding an anti-inflammatory diet, oftentimes you can help naturally control the amount of inflammation in your cat’s mouth.
Second, I begin an at-home oral disinfecting protocol. If cats have a significant amount of plaque or tartar building up, I perform a deep cleaning under anesthesia to remove all the infection along a cat’s gumline.

Third, I prescribe natural anti-inflammatories. I used an esterified fatty acid complex for periodontal health. I also used plant-derived sterols and sterolins, as well as proteolytic enzymes, that all naturally help control the systemic mediators of inflammation.

Fourth, I use a variety of nutraceuticals to improve gum health. This includes ubiquinol, which is the reduced form of CoQ10. I also use a product from Standard Process called Biodent, as well as some great probiotics.

Fifth, I certainly recommend that my clients focus on removing environmental sources of toxins that can negatively impact a cat’s immune system. This means, we stop vaccinating. We also consider vaccine detoxification. We evaluate air, water, and food quality, as well as look at household chemical use.

With early intervention and an aggressive integrative protocol, cats with mild to moderate stomatitis have a chance of reclaiming their health without aggressive surgery.