

# Feline Acne

## Definition

Feline acne is a multifactorial skin disease characterized by comedo formation on the chin and lips.

## Etiology and pathogenesis

Feline acne may be idiopathic, or the condition may develop due to multiple factors that result in a localized keratinization defect of hair follicles and hyperplasia of the skin oil glands. Diseases and conditions which may predispose to the development of acne include mites, ringworm, virus infections (FeLV or FIV and upper respiratory viruses), irritant contact dermatitis, allergic dermatitis, and stress of moving to a new location. The hair follicles become distended with skin oils and dead skin, resulting in the classic comedones (blackheads) of acne. If these follicles rupture and release dead skin and skin oils into the dermis, a foreign body reaction with inflammation will develop. Many bacteria are often found in the follicular plugs and their presence can lead to infection and further inflammation.

## Clinical features

Feline acne can occur in cats of any age and there is no breed or sex predisposition. Lesions generally occur on the lower lips, chin, and occasionally the upper lips. Comedones, (blackheads) especially around the lateral commissures of the mouth and the lower lip, are the predominant findings. Initially, these lesions are not itchy, but they may be noticed by the owner. If the condition progresses, red bumps which may bleed develop and can result in itching and scarring.

Hair loss and redness, and swelling of the chin are seen in severe cases. Excoriations from scratching may occur in cases with severe inflammation. When secondary bacterial infections are present, *Pasteurella multocida*,  $\beta$ -hemolytic streptococci, and coagulase-positive *Staphylococcus* spp. have been isolated.



## Diagnostic tests

Microscopic examination of skin scrapings and impression smears of follicular plugs, ringworm culture, and bacterial culture and sensitivity will rule out infectious causes.

## Management

Feline acne is a condition that generally is not cured, but just controlled with periodic or continuous treatment.

If there is an underlying predisposing condition, such as mites or ringworm, it should be addressed with specific treatment.

Treatment for idiopathic feline acne will vary with the type and severity of lesions. Small numbers of asymptomatic comedones may not require any treatment. Larger numbers of comedones with seborrhea and some swelling of the chin will benefit from the antibacterial and anti-seborrheic actions of weekly washing with Douxo shampoo and application of Douxo Seborrhea Spot-on every three days.

If bacteria are found on impression smears, topical antibacterial preparations containing mupirocin may be helpful. If bacterial folliculitis or furunculosis is present, systemic antibiotics for 2–6 weeks would be appropriate.

The comedolytic activity of topical vitamin A products (0.05% retinoic acid cream) applied daily at first and then on alternate days or twice weekly has been beneficial in some cases. This product may also cause irritation and its use should be monitored closely.

If there is severe inflammation resulting from a foreign body reaction to keratin and sebum of ruptured hair follicles, a course of systemic corticosteroids (prednisone, prednisolone, or methylprednisolone) for 10–14 days is indicated.

Isotretinoin has been advocated for the treatment and control of refractory cases. It acts by decreasing the activity of sebaceous glands and normalising keratinization within hair follicles. Clinical response should occur within 1 month. Once improvement is seen, the isotretinoin dose may be reduced to twice weekly for control. Side-effects of its use in cats include conjunctivitis, periocular crusting, vomiting, and diarrhea. Monthly laboratory screenings are suggested when it is used over prolonged periods. It can cause birth defects in very small doses and appropriate caution should be observed for both animals and humans. As the commercial availability of this drug is limited the alternative would be acitretin. Precautions for this drug would be the same as isotretinoin.

## Key point

- A condition that generally is not cured, but just controlled with periodic or continuous treatment.