

Stomatitis in Cats

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In honor of animal dental health month (February) I thought I would write this months' article about stomatitis, a common oral cavity disorder of cats. Stomatitis is technically defined as inflammation inside the oral cavity of any animal/human. However, in cats we use this term to describe a particular kind of inflammation (lymphoplasmacytic – to be precise) that can occur around the teeth, in the back of the mouth, on the tongue, or even extending down the back of the throat. Some cats have only mild cases with gingivitis (inflammation of the gums around the teeth), while other cats are severely affected with extremely inflamed, swollen, and painful lesions throughout their oral cavities. Clinical signs can range from none at all to bad breath, drooling, trouble eating, and in some cases the cats stop eating completely. There has been a lot of research about stomatitis and many different causes have been proposed: viral infection, allergic reaction to things like food or bacteria in the mouth, and autoimmune (diseases in which the body attacks itself) disorders. But as of right now there is still no definitive cause.

With no known cause, stomatitis can be very frustrating to treat. Each cat is an individual and what works for one may not work with another, and many times we can help control the clinical signs but the cat is never completely cured. There are, however, a few things that can help almost every cat with stomatitis. The first is to switch to stainless steel bowls for the food and water. This helps reduce the number of allergens the cat is exposed to. The second is to change to a high protein, low carbohydrate canned food only diet. Cats are true carnivores and more and more disorders have shown improvement by changing cats to a diet similar to what they would eat in the wild. The third treatment option for cats with stomatitis is a natural supplement called lactoferrin, which can be obtained at health food stores. It comes as a 250 mg capsule that is opened and either mixed with baby food or smeared directly onto the cat's mouth. The more contact time the better.

Other treatments that are used on a case-by-case basis are antibiotics, steroids, laser treatment, and teeth cleaning +/- extractions. Some cats, especially in cats where the inflammation is most severe around the teeth, benefit tremendously from a full-mouth extraction. This might seem extreme, but many cats are much happier with no teeth, rather than a mouth full of painful teeth. Actually, both dogs and cats eat remarkably well without any teeth, their biggest problem is holding their tongues inside their mouths.

Stomatitis can be very frustrating for owners, veterinarians, and especially the cats suffering with the disorder. Many cats can become normal with some combination of the many different treatment options, however, sadly, some cats improve but are never normal. If you think your cat is suffering from stomatitis make an appointment with your veterinarian today.