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VETERINARY
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FELINE ACNE

Feline acne most commonly occurs on the chin, but also may develop around the lips and at the base of the tail. The physical appearance of acne ranges from an accumulation of black, crumbly material on the chin in mild cases to extreme swelling and pus-filled lesions (furunculosis). Most cats seem unaware of the condition, although some may scratch at the area or show discomfort from the swelling.

In most cases, there is not one clear cause of the acne, but several factors acting together. Hypersensitivity or allergy is believed to be at the root of many cases, and acne is one of several symptoms seen in cats with widespread allergic skin disease. The common triggers for an allergic response in cats are:

1. exposure to fleas
2. development of a food hypersensitivity
3. inhalation of certain particles (molds, mildew, pollen, etc.)
4. contact hypersensitivity (usually to plastic bowls).

Addressing a potential allergy is only part of the treatment of feline acne. Other factors that tend to contribute to this skin disorder include:

1. Bacterial infection of the affected skin
2. Chronic exposure to dirt, oil and bacteria on the edge of food and water bowls
3. Excessive oil (sebum) production in affected skin
4. Poor hygiene (lack of normal grooming habits).
5. Taking all of this under consideration, our protocol for treating feline acne is as follows:
6. Treat aggressively for fleas, regardless of whether live fleas can be found.
7. Eliminate all plastic food and water bowls, switch to porcelain, glass or metal.
8. Wash food and water bowls daily in hot, soapy water.
9. Administer antibiotics as directed if a bacterial infection is present.
10. Apply a warm compress (washcloth soaked in warm water) to the affected skin twice a day for 5-10 minutes each time, longer if your cat seems to enjoy it!
11. Apply any topical medication to the affected skin as directed.

In addition, it may be necessary for us to manually express larger acne lesions in order to remove the sebum or pus which is trapped within the affected follicles. Occasionally this requires general anesthesia.

There are some cats that will not improve dramatically with the initial treatment, and by altering the medications we may get better results. Many cats also benefit from a short course of corticosteroids (at anti-inflammatory doses). Some will need a diet change. Extreme cases may warrant surgical removal of refractory lesions.

Prognosis for the resolution of acne is generally good, especially if underlying allergies are addressed.