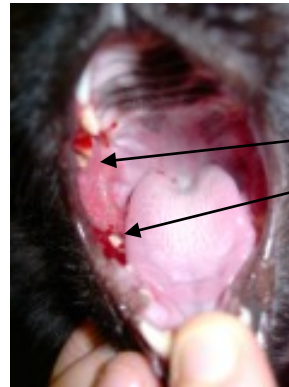


## Stomatitis and gingivitis in cats

These diseases relate to the mouth, with stomatitis meaning inflammation of all the soft tissues of the mouth (in other words, everything other than the bones and teeth) and gingivitis meaning inflammation specifically of the gums. Some cats will suffer a generalised stomatitis where all tissues are involved, but other may show disease confined just to one area or to the gums alone.



Inflammation of the upper gums



Inflammation of the angle of jaw with bleeding

### What causes stomatitis and gingivitis?:

This condition is what is known as an auto-immune condition meaning that the body's immune system has started producing antibodies which, rather than directed against bacteria and viruses as they should be, are directed against the tissues of the mouth causing severe inflammation where they attack with the same vengeance they would an invading micro-organism.

The real question is why does this happen and the honest answer is that we simply do not know fully. The disease can be seen with poor dental hygiene so the immune attack may initially be against bacteria and then become more generalised. Alternatively, the immune system may be stimulated by the otherwise silent presence of one of the cat flu viruses which can occur even in vaccinated cats. Another interesting theory comes from a report of a cat which was affected so severely that it had not eaten for some time and a feeding tube was fitted so that nurses could feed it and bypass the mouth – when this was done, the mouth resolved completely, only to relapse immediately the cat started to eat again itself – this led to consideration as to whether the auto-immune reaction may be a hypersensitivity reaction to dietary proteins.

A few cases are positive to the cat viruses, FeLV and FIV, which suppress the immune system and therefore can lead to excessive bacterial infection of the mouth. These cats look like they have auto-immune stomatitis/gingivitis, but strictly speaking they do not.

### Diagnosis:

Generally, diagnosis can be made on examination of the mouth. In a small number of cases, the inflammation may present as a discrete mass and require biopsy to ensure it is not some form of cancer. In all cases, the cat should have routine blood tests to ensure it has good underlying health. Testing for FeLV and FIV is essential.



### **Treatment:**

Truthfully, it is uncommon to be able to completely cure this problem and, in some cases, ongoing treatment will be required. A number of possible solutions are recommended and will need to be tried in varying combinations to see what works best for each individual cat.

- **Dentistry:** It is vital to maximise the patient's oral hygiene by scaling all teeth and extracting diseased ones under general anaesthesia. Sometimes, it is necessary to remove all the premolar and molar teeth when inflammation around them is severe. Commonly, dentistry will improve the problem only partially, but it certainly will be worse without it so there is value in doing it even if your perception is that it has not seemed to work.
- **Immunosuppressive drugs:** Steroids can be used to blunt the immune response and can be given orally or by periodic depot injection. Side effects of steroids including increased appetite and drinking, weight gain and predisposition to diabetes, but thankfully cats are quite resistant to these compared with dogs or humans. The pros and cons of treatment have to be considered in each case and Vets may try to find solutions without steroid medication at first.
- **Hypoallergenic diet:** As a practice, we find this theory very plausible even though it is not scientifically proven and so we will usually recommend an elimination diet trial if dental treatment has not been successful – however, it is important to do this correctly otherwise it may not be possible to determine if it has worked or failed and may even lead to serious nutritional deficiencies – please ask your own Vet for advice.
- **Antibiotics:** Antibiotics will help to maintain oral hygiene, but are not treating the underlying cause. Ideally, they should not be used continuously.
- **Interferon:** Courses of subcutaneous interferon may be of benefit and are based on the theory that this disease could be related to previous or ongoing viral infection with one of the agents of cat flu.

### **Prognosis:**

Whilst most cases cannot necessarily be cured such that they resolve and do not require ongoing medication, they can usually be well controlled with a combination of the above treatment options. However, what works for one cat may not necessarily be what works best for the next cat and so patience is required to try and work out what is the best long term solution for the individual cat, whilst remaining free of side effects and being cost effective for the owner.