

Bite Wound Abscess

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AT HOME

An abscess forms when an infected bite wound heals over on the surface sealing the infection inside. Diseased tissues liquefies into pus. The surface tissues die leading to fever, the pus breaks through and drains leading to foul odor, and the area may or may not heal.

So what do you see at home?

- A fluid filled swelling
If the abscess has not ruptured, the pet will most likely be feverish which means you will see listlessness and appetite loss. Depending on how long the swelling has been present, the skin involved may be very tender or very fragile.
- A smelly, draining sore
The fluid pocket will eventually rupture and release foul smelling pus. The fever may break once the rotten tissue can drain. You may not see the sore but you probably will smell it.
- A wound that is not healing
Some cats will lick the fur away from the wound making the area more visible. At this point, it is likely to look raw and may no longer be actively draining pus. Sometimes the overlying skin is especially fragile and simply tears away leaving a large raw area.
- A tender area
Sometimes the wound is buried in the fur so deeply that it is not apparent. You may only find a tender area and possibly notice the odor characteristic of deep infection.

Common areas for bite wound abscesses include the face, the legs, and the base of the tail. These are the areas where fighting cats tend to bite one another.

TREATMENT

- If the abscess has not ruptured, it will need to be lanced. Once the abscess is open, it will need to be flushed clean of infected debris. Abscesses are especially painful, and sedation/anesthesia will be required to accomplish this.
- Older abscesses may have enough devitalized overlying tissue to require surgical trimming and stitches. Some abscesses are large enough to require an indwelling rubber drain to assist with removal of the pus. You may have to flush the drain with disinfectant at home.
- The cat will absolutely need antibiotics and anti-pain medications at home. You will need to administer either pills or liquid medication.
- Warm compresses are helpful for the first few days following discharge. The heat helps liquify diseased tissues so that they can drain. To hot pack the area use a warm (not hot) washcloth is applied to the wound for 5-10 minutes once or twice a day.

OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS

Feline leukemia and Feline immunodeficiency viruses represent serious contagious infections spread by bite wounds. The American Association of Feline Practitioners has guidelines for viral testing. Testing, accomplished by a simple kit that can be done in your vet's office, ideally should be done 60 days or more from the time of the bite. Outdoor cats should be tested annually for these viruses regardless of vaccination status. We recommend testing at the time of the abscess treatment if a test has not been performed in the last year. This test will not rule out any infection initiated by this bite but will test for any infection from past bites.

If your cat has not been vaccinated for [rabies](#), a quarantine period will be required.