



ABOUT THE DISEASE

Percutaneous cellulitis or a **cat bite abscess** forms when a penetrating bite wound heals at the skin's surface, but traps bacteria underneath the skin. Along with inflammatory cells, infected tissues will often liquefy into pus and break through the overlying skin releasing a foul odor material.

Most commonly seen in outdoor cats, a **cat bite abscess** will often take time to develop after a bite has occurred. In early stages, a patient may just be painful with mild signs of inflammation. But as the infection persists, swollen, pus-filled abscesses will often develop in the first few days. As the skin degenerates, the abscess will often rupture open, exposing the tissues under the skin.

Aside from bacterial infections, feline patients may also spread viruses through the bite wounds. Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) represents one of the more common viral infections spread by bite wounds. Patients should be tested for FIV 60 days or more after the time of the bite. Please see the [Feline Immunodeficiency Virus](#) document for additional information.

Very rare, but fatal, feline patients may also contract the rabies virus. It is important to make sure the patient's vaccination status is current.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A diagnosis is most often made following a physical examination performed by a veterinarian.

A blood cell count will help determine the stress on the immune system and may guide how the patient is treated.

Depending on extent and severity of infection, the patient might have a swab of the wound taken so that a bacterial culture and sensitivity may be obtained. This test will grow the bacteria (culture) and determine which antibiotics are most effective (sensitivity) to treat the wound. A **cat bite abscess** is often mixed with different types of bacteria that may not all respond to the initial set of treatment.

TREATMENT

Medically, patients will require anti-inflammatories, pain medications, and antibiotics to help manage the disease.

If the **cat bite abscess** has not ruptured, it will need to be lanced open by a veterinarian after the area has been thoroughly clipped and prepared. Once opened, the abscess will be flushed clean of infected debris with sterile saline or a mild antiseptic. Depending on the size of the wound and pain present, this may require sedation.

If the wound is already ruptured, the surrounding area will be clipped free of all hair to reduce ongoing skin contamination. As before, the abscess will be flushed clean of any remaining debris.

In very large abscesses, the wound may be partially or completely closed, and then a latex rubber drain will be placed to help facilitate ongoing wound drainage.

Once patients are discharged home, they must have an Elizabethan collar (e-collar) placed to prevent licking and further contamination of the wound site(s). Caregivers will often be provided cleaning solutions and instructions on how to keep the area clean. Please see the [Wound Care](#) and [Drain Care](#) documents for additional information.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Monitor outdoor cats for signs of lethargy, pain, limping, or swelling.
- Have them evaluated by a veterinarian to reduce severity of the abscess and decrease healing time.
- Do not allow patients access to the wounded areas, as licking does NOT help.
- Proper wound care and cleanings are just as important as antibiotics and anti-inflammatories.