

Lymphoplasmacytic Stomatitis in Cats

Craig G. Ruaux, BVSc, PhD, DACVIM (Small Animal)

BASIC INFORMATION

Description

Stomatitis is inflammation of the mouth, particularly the area in the back of the mouth just behind the tongue. Lymphoplasmacytic stomatitis is a specific form of stomatitis that can result in severe inflammation, often in association with inflammation of the gum line (gingivitis) and the tissues around the teeth (periodontitis). The condition receives its name from the type of cells that are present in the inflammation, a mixture of lymphocytes and plasma cells. Both of these cells are white blood cells, and plasma cells produce antibodies.

Causes

Although the exact cause of lymphoplasmacytic stomatitis is not well defined, it may be an immune-mediated disease in which the cat's immune system attacks its own tissues. Viral infections, such as feline calicivirus and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), may contribute to the disease. These infections may occur alone or together. The body's immune reaction against cells infected with these viruses may cause or aggravate the inflammation.

Clinical Signs

The most common clinical sign is reduced appetite. The cat often appears to be hungry but is unwilling to eat. Swallowing can be painful or difficult, particularly when the back of the mouth is severely inflamed. Halitosis (bad breath) and drooling of saliva may be present in some cats.

On oral examination, the back of the mouth, gum margins, and base of the teeth are usually very red and inflamed. Bleeding of the gums, tooth loss, exposed teeth, growth of the gums over the teeth, or raised proliferative lesions in the back of the mouth may be seen.

Diagnostic Tests

Lymphoplasmacytic stomatitis can look similar to other diseases in the mouth, such as eosinophilic granuloma and squamous cell carcinoma (a form of cancer). To definitively diagnose lymphoplasmacytic stomatitis, samples are collected for microscopic examination. Scrapings of the affected tissues may be examined under the microscope (cytology), or surgical biopsies may be submitted for histopathologic examination. Most sample collection techniques require a short period of general anesthesia. Other routine laboratory

tests may be recommended to look for effects on other organs. Tests for the related viruses may also be recommended.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

In some cats, aggressive cleaning of the teeth (scaling and polishing) and scrupulous maintenance of dental hygiene are effective treatments. In some cats, multiple teeth must be extracted. Antibiotics are often helpful to control secondary bacterial infections.

In many cases, anti-inflammatory or immune-suppressive drugs are required to control the inflammation. High doses of oral or injectable glucocorticoid steroid drugs (prednisone, methylprednisolone, triamcinolone, or others) are commonly used. If the disease does not respond adequately to steroids, then other immune-suppressive drugs, such as chlorambucil and aurothio-glucose, may be added to the therapy.

Follow-up Care

Cats receiving anti-inflammatory or immune-suppressive therapy require regular recheck visits, typically at 14-day intervals, during the initial period of therapy. Once the inflammation is under control, recheck visits become less frequent. Substantial clinical improvement may take several weeks.

Side effects such as increased water consumption, weight gain, and occasional restlessness or irritability may occur with high-dose steroids and other immune-suppressive drugs, so notify your veterinarian if any new signs appear. Laboratory tests may be repeated to determine the response to therapy and to monitor for side effects of the medications.

Prognosis

Prognosis for cats with lymphoplasmacytic stomatitis is fair to guarded (uncertain). If the cat responds to dental hygiene measures, tooth extraction, and immune-suppressive therapy with return of a good appetite, prognosis is favorable. Even when the signs resolve, treatment may only control the disease; it is hard to cure.

Clinical signs in some cats are difficult to control, and increasingly powerful immune-suppressive therapy carries a greater chance of side effects. Some cats are euthanized because of a poor response to therapy and persistent oral discomfort.