



Feline Chronic Gingivostomatitis (FCGS)

What is Gingivostomatitis?

Gingivitis is inflammation of the gingiva, also known as the gum tissues, that surround the teeth. Stomatitis is also inflammation, but is inflammation affecting the other soft tissues in the mouth. This can include the insides of the lips, the back of the mouth, under the tongue, and the tongue itself. When the two terms are combined, gingivostomatitis, this refers to a unique syndrome in cats that results in severe inflammation that surrounds the teeth and the tissues in the back of the mouth and around the tongue. In these cats the oral soft tissues can appear ulcerated (weeping), bloody, swollen and infected. This severely painful condition can result in signs of oral pain such as pawing at the mouth, acting head-shy, gagging when scratched under the chin, excessive drooling, decreased appetite and decreased grooming. This can be severely debilitating for your pet.

Cats with feline chronic gingivostomatitis often develop severe periodontal disease, as the inflammation around their teeth spreads into the underlying bone, damaging structures supporting the teeth and leading to bone loss. The inflammation can be so severe that teeth may fall out, your cat may stop eating, and aggressive therapy is often needed to stop the inflammation.



The cat on the left is affected by severe gingivostomatitis with ulcerated and bleeding oral soft tissues. The cat on the right has normal oral soft tissues.

What Causes FCGS?

Unfortunately, the exact cause of FCGS is still unknown. It seems that cats with FCGS have a hyper-immune reaction to plaque and oral bacteria that leads to this inflammation. This may first show up with the eruption of the adult teeth. Most cats are not diagnosed with this condition until they are over 6 years old. However, we do know that we can make a huge improvement in their clinical signs and even cure them of this disease in some cases with proper therapy.

How can you treat FCGS?

The first step in treatment of these cats is to make sure that a thorough work-up does not indicate another cause for the inflammation. This includes hematology, blood chemistry panels, as well as testing for Feline Leukemia virus infection and Feline AIDS infection. If your pet has not been tested within the last year and goes outside, retesting for FeLV/FIV is indicated. If we find that they are safe anesthetic candidates and there are no other occult reasons for the inflammation, then the first step in treating this inflammation is to thoroughly clean the teeth, remove any teeth that are affected by severe *periodontal disease* or *feline resorptive lesions*, and to biopsy the tissue in the mouth to confirm the diagnose of FCGS. This, combined with aggressive, daily, at-home oral care may resolve the inflammation in a small percentage of cats.

The large majority of cats with FCGS will not respond to cleaning alone. In cats diagnosed with chronic gingivostomatitis, the gold standard of treatment is to extract all premolar and molar teeth, leaving behind no root fragments, and monitoring them frequently in their postoperative period. **In 60% of cats, extraction of the premolar and molar teeth resolves the inflammation.** In 80% of cats, their clinical signs will be well-controlled, allowing them to live a happy life. This means *that 20% of cats who have FCGS will not respond to premolar and molar teeth extraction.* In this small percentage of cats, we may have to proceed with extraction of the canine and incisor teeth, and they may need further medications to try to control the inflammation and pain. Cats that have been diagnosed with FIV or FeLV may be more likely to fall into this non-responsive category of cats.

Unfortunately, using medications to try to reduce the pain and inflammation WITHOUT performing extractions only works for short periods of time, and tends to worsen long-term prognosis in cats with FCGS. If your cat has been diagnosed with FCGS, it is important to proceed with extraction of the premolar and molar teeth as soon as is feasible to give them the best prognosis. The longer the inflammation is allowed to continue, and the farther back in the mouth inflammation spreads, the slower and less complete the recovery from surgery. In addition, malignancies (cancer) can develop from sites of chronic inflammation.

Our current recommendation for cats with FCGS is to act early: dental x-rays, surgical extraction of the premolar and molar teeth with excision of the inflamed tissue, and confirmation of complete removal of all roots yields a good to excellent prognosis in the majority of our patients. Postoperative nursing care with pain management is key to their recovery, and most cats are fully recovered in 7 to 14 days. However, resolution of the inflammation may take 4-8 weeks until it is fully resolved. During the healing period, wet food is ideal to let the oral cavity heal. However, after they have healed, many cats return to eating kibble, either dry or soaked with water, without issue. With the pain and inflammation in their mouths resolved, they tend to live happy, content lives.

For that small subset of cats that do not respond to extractions, there are still options for treatment, including some new methods that are still in the early stages of research. If your cat falls into this category, we will do our best to find the best possible way to improve your cats health and well-being. FCGS can be a frustrating and expensive diagnosis, but SacVDS is dedicated to helping you understand this disease and treat your cat.