ACVIM Fact Sheet: Feline Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Overview
Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is the most common oral tumor in cats and typically affects middle-aged to older cats. Factors that may increase the risk of oral SCC include flea collars, high volumes of canned food, and household smoke exposure; however, there is no one factor that is known to cause SCC. Unfortunately, oral SCC is an aggressive locally invasive tumor that is difficult to control; it appears to have a low rate of spread to other sites (metastasis) but this may be simply due to the short survival times following diagnosis.

Signs & Symptoms
Oral SCC in cats are typically large, invasive and often ulcerated tumors that occur anywhere in the mouth, including under the tongue, the palate (roof of the mouth), the upper jaw (maxilla) and lower jaw (mandible). SCC often invades bone and thus can be associated with significant discomfort. Most cats see their veterinarian following identification of a mass or swelling by the owner, but other symptoms can include loose teeth, pain associated with the face or chewing, excessive drooling and often blood-tinged drool, lack of grooming, decreased appetite and weight loss.

Diagnosis
Diagnosis of oral SCC requires a biopsy of the tumor with the cat under general anesthesia so that a good sample of the tumor can be collected. A thorough oral examination can be performed at the same time, and the tumor is typically measured and documented along with the location. While not diagnostic for SCC, the diagnostic work-up includes complete blood count and serum chemistry profile, lymph node assessment via cytology, and chest x-rays in order to confirm that the tumor SCC is confined to the mouth. For some tumors, particularly those located in the front of the lower jaw (mandible), advanced imaging with computed tomography (a CT scan) may be recommended.

Treatment & Aftercare
Unfortunately, there is no known effective treatment for oral SCC in cats that offers long-term control and survival. If possible, surgery is often the treatment of choice for small tumors, particularly those located in the front of the lower jaw. Most cats present with large (> 2 cm) tumors that are difficult to remove completely with surgery; post-surgery radiation therapy may be recommended in some cases or palliative radiation therapy may be offered in lieu of surgery. Chemotherapy likely does not play a pivotal role in management but may be palliative in some cases. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can be useful in managing discomfort.
**Prognosis**
The prognosis for cats with oral SCC is poor and most cats will have survival times ranging from 3-6 months. Cats with small tumors located on the lower jaw (mandible) that are treated with surgery have a better chance of surviving for one year; however, most will still eventually succumb to the disease.

**Fact Sheet Author**
Jessica Lawrence, DVM, DACVIM (Oncology), DACVR (Radiation Oncology), MRCVS, DECVDI (Radiation Oncology)

© 2015

**Fact Sheet Disclaimer**
The fact sheets which appear on the ACVIM website are provided on an "as is" basis and are intended for general consumer understanding and education only. Any access to this information is voluntary and at the sole risk of the user.

Nothing contained in this fact sheet is or should be considered, or used as a substitute for, veterinary medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. The information provided on the website is for educational and informational purposes only and is not meant as a substitute for professional advice from a veterinarian or other professional. Fact sheets are designed to educate consumers on veterinary health care and medical issues that may affect their pet's daily lives. This site and its services do not constitute the practice of any veterinary medical or other professional veterinary health care advice, diagnosis or treatment. ACVIM disclaims liability for any damages or losses, direct or indirect, that may result from use of or reliance on information contained within the information.

ACVIM advises consumers to always seek the advice of a veterinarian, veterinary specialist or other qualified veterinary health care provider with any questions regarding a pet's health or medical conditions. Never disregard, avoid or delay in obtaining medical advice from your veterinarian or other qualified veterinary health care provider because of something you have read on this site. If you have or suspect that your pet has a medical problem or condition, please contact a qualified veterinary health care professional immediately.

ACVIM reserves the right at any time and from time to time to modify or discontinue, temporarily or permanently, these fact sheets, with or without notice.