



# Navarro Small Animal Clinic

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## FELINE GINGIVITIS-STOMATITIS

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Feline gingivitis-stomatitis complex is a painful oral condition resulting from certain diseases that cause inflammation of the oral cavity. It is a disease unique to cats and can be extremely frustrating to treat. The biggest problem in treating this disease is that the underlying reasons for the problem are not clearly understood; for any individual cat, there may multiple underlying reasons. The main reasons that are thought to contribute to this disease complex are hypersensitivity to plaque on teeth, autoimmune dysfunction (allergic cause or impaired immune system), and viral diseases.

Clinical signs can occur at any age and include bad breath, drooling, difficulty swallowing, oral pain, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Visible abnormalities in the mouth include inflammation with ulceration and proliferation of the gingival tissue. Lesions often times extend down the back of the throat area and affect the soft palate. The mouth is usually very painful when opened since it may open some of the ulcerated lesions, causing them to crack and bleed. Chronically affected cats commonly have cavity like lesions, gum disease, loosening of teeth, and tooth loss.

The clinical signs and history of these cats are usually quite classic and lead to the diagnosis of feline gingivitis-stomatitis; however the gold standard in diagnosing any disease is by biopsy of affected tissue to rule out other problems, such as cancer. Every cat with this problem should be tested for feline aids and feline leukemia since there is a very high rate of viral infection in affected cats, and this also is important to know in long term treatment and other systemic illness that may arise.

There are treatments that have been used in cats affected by gingivitis-stomatitis, with response variable. On a long-term basis prognosis is generally poor. Therapy should be aimed at controlling clinical signs and pain to allow the cat to be comfortable and be able to eat normally. Treatments include dental cleanings as needed, and maintenance of good oral hygiene with chlorhexidine mouth rinses and toothbrushing to control plaque accumulation. Anti-inflammatory or immunosuppressant drugs, usually steroids, are necessary to control the severe inflammation. Antibiotics are of variable benefit, and usually must be combined with an anti-inflammatory. Non-traditional therapies, such as chemotherapy drugs, laser and cryotherapy have been tried but have not proven very beneficial. In severely affected or unresponsive cases, extraction of all the “cheek teeth” (all those behind the canine teeth) may be of great benefit. This is a last resort treatment to be reserved for when all else has failed. For any individual cat, response to any treatment can vary, and choice of treatment should be based on clinical response and tailored to the specific individual.

This disease can be extremely frustrating to treat. It is important to understand that there is no “cure” for this problem. Control of clinical signs and pain is the goal in treatment.