

Feline Eosinophilic Granulomas

What are feline eosinophilic granulomas?

Feline eosinophilic granulomas are peculiar lesions which are found in cats affecting the skin and other sites. These lesions have a characteristic appearance when examined under the microscope with the presence of eosinophils which are a form of inflammatory cell – hence the name eosinophilic granulomas.

The most common site for these lesions is on the lips, usually the upper lips, where they appear as ulcers. They are sometimes referred to as "rodent ulcers" although this term is incorrect. The lesions can be small and hardly noticeable but can be quite extensive with a very obvious deficit of the lip. Occasionally bleeding occurs from the lesions. Although this is the most common site for eosinophilic granulomas they can also be found in other sites. At most other sites they appear as raised areas where the overlying fur is lost leading to a fleshy appearance to the lesion rather than as ulcers when the lips are affected. They may be found elsewhere on the skin. Common sites are the back legs and the belly. These skin lesions can be quite extensive and may be itchy for the cats, which may frequently lick and bite at the affected site. Eosinophilic granulomas can also develop in the mouth at a number of sites including the gums and palate.

What causes eosinophilic granuloma?

The cause of eosinophilic granulomas is not clear. They just seem to arise spontaneously. There is a suspicion that some form of allergic response may be involved especially in the recurrent cases of eosinophilic granuloma.

How can eosinophilic granulomas be diagnosed?

Microscopic examination of a lesion is necessary to be absolutely certain of the diagnosis of eosinophilic granulomas. The appearance of the ulcers on the lips is generally very characteristic so we may not feel that a biopsy is required, particularly since this may accentuate the lip deficit. For lesions elsewhere on the skin or in the mouth we may advise that a biopsy is taken to confirm the diagnosis of eosinophilic granuloma and to rule out other possibilities. Biopsies can generally be obtained very simply.

How is eosinophilic granuloma treated?

The most common method used to treat eosinophilic granulomas is to use corticosteroids. These can be given in a variety of different forms, but most often as tablets. In some cases the corticosteroids may be given by injection, occasionally directly into the lesion. There is usually a good response particularly with the most common form affecting the lips. Treatment is usually continued for some time (weeks to months) as eosinophilic granulomas frequently recur and prolonged treatment will minimise the chances of this happening. Side effects of corticosteroids

are usually not significant in cats, but with prolonged use some changes can occur, such as an increase in weight.

A variety of other treatments can be used including other drugs, surgical removal of the lesions and cryosurgery which involves freezing the lesions with liquid nitrogen using a probe under anaesthetic. These treatments are sometimes used if lesions keep recurring. Some forms of eosinophilic granuloma prove more difficult to treat, for example extensive skin lesions, and in such cases we might decide to use such a treatment from the outset.

In the case of some forms of skin lesions good control of fleas is essential and we may discuss this with you. If your cat is attacking the lesions we may suggest fitting a special collar to prevent self-inflicted damage.

What is the outlook for eosinophilic granuloma?

Most cases respond very well to treatment. They do sometimes show a tendency to recur but this can usually be managed satisfactorily. Occasional cases do prove more difficult to treat but this is unusual.