

BAY OF PLENTY TIMES

Opinion: How to avoid pet abscesses

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Dr Liza Schneider says keeping your cat's immune system healthy is a big step towards preventing and treating abscesses. Photo/File

Bay of Plenty Times
By: Dr Liza Schneider



OPINION:

Abscesses are usually the result of puncture wounds, with cats they are commonly inflicted during cat fights and occasionally a foreign body such as a thorn, splinter or claw can remain.

Infection starts under the skin and pus accumulates as the body tries to fight off the infection and get rid of the foreign material. It is very painful when a lump forms, pressure builds and there's nowhere for the fluid to go.

Many abscesses burst on their own, which provides great relief.

Sometimes you can feel a scab over the area and when you pull it away pus comes out. Once an abscess is draining cats and dogs will often lick and clean the area which assists with healing.

You can help by wiping the area clean twice a day with warm water and a swab or cotton wool pad.

Pets with healthy immune systems may be much less prone to developing abscesses and often heal very quickly.

Optimal immune system function can be supported by feeding a wholesome, balanced diet with optimal amounts of immune supporting nutrients like omega 3 fatty acids and anti-oxidants.

Another important strategy to help support a healthy immune system is to provide your animal with a comfortable and stress-free home environment.

With cats, this can be difficult in suburbia as the neighbourhood may be densely populated with cats and fights are often inevitable.

Ensuring that you don't have too many cats in your home, that they all have a safe place to rest in and retreat to and that your surrounding neighbourhood doesn't have stray / unowned cats is important.

Desexing cats can make a big difference to their territorial behaviour like fighting and is very important to promote a healthy environment for cats.

If your pet is unwell, painful, feverish, off their food, lethargic or the abscess hasn't burst then a visit to the vet can help them to feel a lot better.

We treat abscesses by surgically lancing, draining and flushing them to ensure that foreign material is dislodged.

This is often performed under sedation or anaesthetic because they can be so painful. Sometimes we need to remove dying tissue which promotes more rapid healing and resolution of the infection.

The wound will often be left open to encourage drainage and sometimes we place a special surgical drain to assist this process.

Antibiotics may be needed to help clear up a bad infection but complementary therapies like homeopathy, herbal medicine, ozonated gel, hyperbaric oxygen therapy and others can help aid healing tremendously.

Correction: An earlier version of this column should have been labelled as an Opinion piece.

Dr Liza Schneider is director of Holistic Vets in Tauranga.

