

Squamous Cell Carcinoma in Cats



Sun exposure in cats can lead to skin cancer. White-skinned cats are more at risk and the earflaps, nose and lower eyelids are the most commonly affected areas. In the early stages the skin may look pink and scaly with some degree of hair loss (solar dermatitis), but as the condition progresses the area becomes crusted and eroded.

If left untreated, some cases progress and a malignant tumour called Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC) can develop. SCCs are locally invasive, but do not spread rapidly to other parts of the body. If the ears are affected, the cat may shake its head and cause bleeding. SCCs on the nose often bleed if the cat rubs its nose or sneezes.

How can squamous cell carcinoma be prevented?

To prevent solar dermatitis in the first place, exposure to sunlight should be avoided.

This is best achieved by keeping the cat indoors between 9.00am and 4.00pm. It is possible to use sunblock creams, but unfortunately cats will rapidly groom or lick this off. (Some products may be toxic to cats so check with your vet before you start using a cream). There are special sunblocks available formulated for cats.



How is squamous cell carcinoma treated?

If the ears are affected, surgical removal is the best treatment. Usually complete removal of the earflap is necessary. This does not affect hearing or balance, and cats look adorable with 'teddy bear ears'.

Early lesions of the nose and eyelids can be successfully treated by diathermy, or cauterising the abnormal tissue. This requires a general anaesthetic. In very advanced cases with nose involvement, removal of the nose may be required.

More advanced cancers may require a combination of surgery and radiation therapy with specialist oncologists in Brisbane.

The prognosis is usually good if the disease is discovered early, and all the diseased tissue can be removed. If all the SCC is not adequately removed, the tumour will recur at the operation site and may start to affect quality of life.

