

# Abscesses



## What is an abscess?

An abscess is an infected wound that heals over on the surface, or develops as a pocket under the skin, trapping bacteria **inside** your pet. It often occurs with bite wounds and other traumatic injuries. After the bacteria are trapped inside the body, they multiply. Your pet's immune system forms a localized accumulation of pus and fluid under the skin. Abscesses are extremely painful to your pet.

## What are the signs of an abscess?

- Your pet may be feverish, lethargic or irritable. Cats, especially, may hide or act aggressive when you touch the area near the abscess.
- Swelling and heat at the wound site.
- Abscesses usually feel fluid-filled, but depending on the age of the abscess, they can also feel firm.
- The tissue around and above the abscess often turns black and can die and come off.
- If the abscess is on the foot, you may notice your pet limping.
- Abscesses sometimes open and start draining blood, pus and fluid that may have a foul odor. If an abscess opens, a drain tract or hole in the skin may be visible. If left untreated, abscesses will often cycle, by filling, opening and closing. During this cycle, there will be pain and your pet's body must work hard to continue fighting the infection.

## Is my pet at risk?

Any pet can develop an abscess. Abscesses are most common with traumatic injuries or puncture wounds. Dental disease and infected teeth can also cause abscesses on your pet's face and in the mouth. Abscesses are a very common occurrence in outdoor cats, due to fighting. Abscesses in cats from fighting can often be found around the tail, head and neck. Due to the shape of a puncture wound, the bacteria are pushed deep below the skin area. Pulling or shaking during a bite can form a large pocket under the skin that is a perfect haven for an abscess to begin.

## Can abscesses be prevented?

The best way to prevent abscesses is to treat all bite wounds or puncture wounds by seeking proper care from your Banfield doctor immediately. Bite wounds are often very difficult to see when first created and pockets under the skin can be difficult to find. In minor cases, proper wound cleaning, in addition to oral antibiotics and injections, may be enough to prevent an abscess from forming. Brushing and petting is an excellent time to closely examine your pet. Be sure to check areas such as your pet's paws, the neck and chin, and stomach area for injuries, swelling or heat during your daily petting sessions. Keep all dogs under leash control when outside and keep cats indoors. All pets should be neutered or spayed to help lessen aggressive tendencies and the desire to roam.

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For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

## **How will the doctor treat my pet for abscesses?**

A thorough physical exam and history of your pet's symptoms will help the doctor diagnose an abscess. The fur will need to be clipped over the suspected area. Depending on the size, age, and degree of infection, your pet's doctor will determine if surgery is necessary. More severe abscesses may require surgery which will be performed under general anesthesia. The abscess will be opened, cleansed and closed if possible. Special drain tubes may be placed to allow pus and fluid to drain from the wound while it heals.

All pets with abscesses require antibiotics. It is very important to understand the dosage and how to give the medication. If you have any questions please ask your veterinarian at any time.

## **My pet needs surgery for his abscess. Will he be in pain?**

Sedation or general anesthesia was used throughout the procedure, as well as an injectable pain reliever today that should keep your pet comfortable tonight. Your doctor may also recommend oral pain relievers for you to give at home for the next few days to ensure that your pet remains comfortable. Your pet may be reluctant to get up and walk this evening and act sore. Some degree of discomfort is expected. If you are concerned about your pet's behavior, please contact your Banfield doctor as soon as possible. If your Banfield hospital is closed, please contact a local emergency veterinary hospital.

## **What can I expect when I pick my pet up at the hospital?**

Your pet's fur was clipped over the abscess and any areas that needed further investigation. Abscesses often have bruising over the area. Your doctor may have used visible external sutures or dissolvable, internal sutures that you cannot see, depending on the surgical technique and personal preferences. There may be two or more openings in the abscess and a drain tube may have been placed to allow it to drain. Blood, fluid or pus may be leaking from the areas around the drain. This is what we want. Abscesses will reform unless they can properly drain.

## **What do I need to do for my pet at home tonight?**

Someone will have to be home with your pet tonight. Your pet should be responsive and able to walk. Most pets will want to sleep when home.

Your Banfield team will show you how to care for the surgical site and drains. The abscess area may need to be "milked" which requires gentle downward pressure to expel fluid and buildup from the drain and abscess.

### **Special diet instructions:**

Wait at least two hours after getting home before feeding. Feed your pet only 1/4 to 1/2 the normal amount of food and water, or offer ice cubes. This will help prevent your pet from vomiting. Just like people, pets may feel nauseous after surgery and vomit if given large amounts of water or food. Tomorrow you may continue food and water as usual unless otherwise instructed by your pet's doctor.

### **Watch your pet for the following signs:**

- Becoming unresponsive/inability to stand
- Opening of sutured area
- Pale or white gums (check near the teeth)
- More than one or two episodes of vomiting/diarrhea (again some pets may feel nauseous after anesthesia)

## Abscesses *continued...*

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If you notice that your pet has any of these symptoms contact your Banfield doctor immediately as they may be signs of serious post-operative concerns. If your Banfield hospital is not open, seek immediate assistance at a veterinary emergency center.

We recommend the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ emergency hospital  
whose phone number is \_\_\_\_\_.

## What can I expect the week following surgery and what do I need to do then?

Unlike people, pets cannot be told that they've had surgery and need to "take it easy and keep an eye on their incision site." Most pets are ready to be their active selves the day following surgery, although a few may act sore or stiff for two to three days. It is extremely important to discourage your pet from the following activities:

- Licking/chewing at the incision site. Drain tubes are extremely tempting for pets to chew on. When your pet is unattended they must wear an Elizabethan collar (cone). Pets can open up incision sites very quickly, and the pain of doing so does not always discourage them. Licking or chewing at the site can cause infection, delay healing and even require additional surgery. Repair of the surgical site can be twice as expensive due to the damage caused. So keep an eye on your pet at all times and place an Elizabethan collar on them when you can't, especially at night.
- Running/jumping/long walks. Pets will have to miss their morning run with you or afternoon dog park romp the first week. Some pets may even need to be walked in their yard with a leash to control their activity level, especially active young puppies. Running, jumping up and increased activity can tear internal and external sutures.
- Getting the incision wet. No baths or swimming for 10 to 14 days.

### Check your pet's incision site at least daily for signs of:

- Your pet removing the drain or suture (if external sutures are present)
- Return of the fluid swelling

### Also watch for:

- Coughing or irritation of the throat. Coughing in pets often sounds like they are trying to vomit. Often they retch at the end and may produce some spittle.
- Refusal to eat or drink for more than 12 hours
- Lethargy or disorientation after the first day home
- Ongoing vomiting or diarrhea
- Soreness/stiffness that lasts more than three days after surgery

If you notice any of these symptoms, or have any questions or concerns about the health of your pet, please contact your Banfield doctor. Have your pet's incision checked in 10 to 14 days. If present, any external sutures will be removed at that time as well. Make sure to follow instructions for rechecks. Drain removals are usually scheduled three to five days post-operatively.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about the health of your pet, please contact your Banfield doctor.



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