

## Feline Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)

### What is a feline oral squamous cell carcinoma?

Oral SCC is a cancer that develops when the normal tissues in the mouth grow rapidly and in a malignant manner. Unfortunately, this type of tumor is locally invasive (meaning it readily destroys the underlying bone), but movement to other areas of the body (metastasis) is uncommon.

### What are the clinical signs of oral squamous cell carcinoma?

Cats with oral SCC are very good at hiding their clinical signs, however you may see blood in the water bowl, a decrease in appetite, weight loss, or a tumor develop in the mouth.

### How is oral squamous cell carcinoma diagnosed?

The diagnosis of an oral SCC is based on surgical biopsy. Although this tumor has a comparatively low chance of moving to other areas of the body, full staging with samples of the lymph nodes under the chin and chest x-rays to evaluate the lungs are recommended prior to starting treatment.

### How is oral squamous cell carcinoma treated?

The treatment of choice for a locally invasive oral tumor would ideally be complete surgical removal. Unfortunately, this is a difficult decision because of the extensive nature of these tumors as well as the relatively small jaw size of cats. In addition, cats do not tolerate large, aggressive surgery in this area well. Thus, alternative options must be considered including radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

The use of full-course radiation therapy is often recommended. However, even in reports of cats treated with aggressive surgery or the combination of surgery and full-course radiation therapy, median survival times are only approximately 2-4 months. Because of the lack of long-term tumor control in spite of aggressive therapy, another reasonable option is palliative radiation therapy. Palliative radiation therapy consists of several treatments given over a few days or weeks and is aimed at alleviating pain, inflammation, and swelling associated with the tumor. At the dosages used, side effects from radiation therapy are not expected.

Chemotherapy could be used to maximize the effects of radiation. However, chemotherapy alone has little effect on SCC in cats. A newer drug, Palladia could be considered. This is an oral drug that can affect blood flow to the tumor, potentially decreasing growth of the tumor. This drug has not been extensively used in these cases, but cats tolerate it well and newer literature suggests a reasonable response or control of disease for 4-6 months.

Lastly Piroxicam, a non-steroidal, can be used for its anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties as well as possible anticancer effects. This is often given in combination with radiation and chemotherapy; however, Piroxicam can be administered alone.

### What is the prognosis for feline oral squamous cell carcinoma?

Unfortunately, feline oral SCC are aggressive tumors that cause significant pain and difficulty eating. Even with aggressive treatment, prognosis is poor.