

My Cat Has White Gums

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, says anemia could affect gum color.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: If a cat has white gums, what does that mean?

A: Pale gums suggest that your cat is anemic (deficient in red blood cells). If the gums are truly white, and not just pale pink, it suggests severe anemia. Pale or white gums should be investigated immediately by your vet.

If your vet confirms that your cat is anemic, he can do a test called a reticulocyte count to determine whether or not the bone marrow is successfully trying to replenish the blood stream. If the reticulocyte count is high, this means the bone marrow is trying to replenish the missing red blood cells, and this narrows the cause of the anemia down to either blood loss (internal or external bleeding), or lysis (destruction of the red blood cells by the cat's own immune system).

If the bone marrow is not responding to the missing red blood cells, a bone marrow evaluation may be necessary to ultimately figure out the cause of the anemia. Depending on how severe your cat's anemia is, your vet may recommend a blood transfusion to stabilize your cat while waiting for test results.