

My Cat Suffers From Herpesvirus

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses symptoms and treatment options for the virus.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

Posted: Jan. 30, 2009, 3 a.m. EST

Q: My 15-year-old cat has had respiratory issues his entire life, mainly due herpesvirus. In the past, I've used prednisone, lysine and Augmentin during flare-ups, at which time he develops a greenish-yellow nasal discharge. Recently, it's gotten worse. He underwent a head X-ray which showed no tooth infection or any kind of polyps. His nose (right side only) was flushed and a culture and biopsy were performed which showed a severe sinus infection and bacteria of the E.coli type.

He's been on Clavamox, Clindamycin and now Cefa-Drops, none of which are making any difference. His nose continues to spew out the discharges; his eye waters and his nose becomes red and blister-like from the constant flow. His weight is good, he eats and drinks fine and eliminates just fine. A veterinary specialist is working on a "plan" to help get this under control so we can eventually manage it. Please help! What course would you take with him? I know it's chronic and will never be cured, but there must be a way to get this under control.

A: Many kittens will acquire an infection with herpesvirus when they are very young. In some instances, the infection is so severe that it causes damage to the delicate turbinate bones in the nasal cavity. This compromises the ability of the cat to fight off future flare-ups of the herpesvirus. These cats become chronic sneezers and snufflers, and I have several in my practice.

These cases can be very difficult to treat. There is no consistently effective therapy for chronic viral diseases in cats. Lysine is safe, and has been shown to be helpful in some cats. Antibiotics treat secondary bacterial infections, but they do not treat the primary viral infection. You've tried many antibiotics, with limited success, it seems.

A recent study in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery showed the antibiotic pradofloxacin to be fairly effective in controlling the bacterial component of these respiratory infections, but unfortunately, this drug is not available in the U.S. There are similar types of drugs that are available in the U.S., such as orbifloxacin or marbofloxacin. You might want to ask your veterinarian to prescribe this for your cat to see how he responds.

I've had some success treating these cats with the antiviral drug famciclovir. You should ask your veterinarian about this drug. Alpha interferon has also been reported to help some cats with chronic herpesvirus infections. Keep in mind that these drugs are unlikely to lead to a cure, but they often lessen clinical signs of disease.

If I were treating your cat, I'd prescribe an antibiotic like marbofloxacin, combined with an antiviral drug like famciclovir, for 30 days. I'd continue to give lysine, as well. See if your veterinarian agrees with this suggestion. Good luck with your cat.