

My Cat's Herpesvirus Care Is Expensive

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses medication for the common condition.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: My male cat, Moses, has feline herpes. It surfaces in his eyes. I took him to an ophthalmologist for animals. He took a scraping from his eyes and this was his diagnosis. Moses has been on two drops for the past year and a powder to go in his wet food and now they are not working. I know I need to take him back to this doctor, but at the moment it is cost-prohibitive. Is there anything natural that would help him? Or is there anything else you can suggest that I do for him?

A: Herpesvirus infections are very common in cats. Once cats become infected, the virus stays in the body forever. During times of stress or immunosuppression, the virus can re-emerge and cause clinical signs. Most cats show signs of upper respiratory infection (sneezing, nasal discharge), but some cats are affected mainly in their eyes.

It is tough to make recommendations based on the limited information you've given me. I suspect that one of the drops that you're giving is an antiviral drop, and yes, these medicines are costly. I suspect the powder that you're putting in the food is the amino acid lysine. Lysine is beneficial for cats with herpesvirus infections.

I don't know of anything "natural" to help your cat. If topical antiviral drops are not helping, it may be necessary to give oral antiviral drugs, such as famciclovir. This can sometimes help resolve stubborn flare-ups of the herpesvirus.

Unfortunately, oral antiviral drugs are fairly pricey, too. Perhaps a short course, like two weeks, would be enough to get his current eye problem under control, and then you could maintain things with the drops and the lysine powder. Talk to your veterinarian about this. By the time you read this, the price of famciclovir may have come down.