

## Game Over

**Strike out your cat's chance to develop cat bite abscesses.**

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Typically, a cat that has been bitten appears fine after the encounter. During the next two to four days, the bacteria deposited into the wound begin to multiply, and cats develop a fever, become lethargic and often stop eating. Owners usually take their cats to the veterinarian at this stage, where the abscess appears as a painful swelling. In most cases, puncture wounds or small lacerations are present, and the area may feel warm. If not discovered in this early stage, the abscess will continue to swell, burrowing through tissues and accumulating more pus. The abscess may then burst through the overlying skin, releasing creamy yellow or brownish, often malodorous pus. Overlying hair may become matted with the dried discharge. Common locations for abscesses are the face and neck, tail, back and legs, although any part of the body can be bitten during a cat fight. If a bite wound occurs in a location that does not have much loose skin, such as a leg, the infection can dissect its way through the tissues, causing diffuse swelling, also known as cellulites, instead of a discrete collection of pus.

**Take Home**The goal of treatment is to prevent further contamination by cleaning the wound, removing dead tissue and treating the area for infection. The earlier treatment is instituted, the better the chances of the wound healing without complication. Gary Norsworthy, DVM, a board-certified feline specialist and owner of Alamo Feline Health Center in San Antonio, has treated hundreds of catfight abscesses, and authored a chapter on these types of injuries in a veterinary textbook, "The Feline Patient." "In most cases, the cat is anesthetized so an incision can be made into the abscess," Norsworthy said. "The wound is then flushed with an antibacterial solution to further remove pus and other debris." If detected and addressed at an early stage, lancing, flushing and antibiotics may be the only requirements. If discovered at a later stage, after significant tissue damage occurs beneath the skin, the veterinarian may need to debride the wound by removing dead or compromised tissue. In some cases, the veterinarian may insert a drain (a piece of soft, rubber tubing that exits at the lowest point of the wound) to allow any future accumulation of fluid or pus to escape. With large wounds, sutures may be required to partially close them after debriding. However, most wounds remain open to drain and heal on their own. Very large skin defects may require reconstructive skin surgery after the infection has resolved.