

FACTSHEET

Skin Cancer in Cats

What is skin cancer?

Cats, just like humans, can get sunburnt. If your cat has light coloured fur on the nose or ears they are more susceptible to getting sunburnt, and in turn, getting skin cancer.

White cats are the most susceptible to skin cancer due to the light coloured fur and light pigmentation of the skin. Skin cancer in cats usually develops due to the skin being sunburnt a number of times. The sunburn causes the skin cells to become damaged, and this increases the risk of skin cancer.

Once cancer has developed, the damaged cells begin to deteriorate and appear to be eaten away. If diagnosed in the early stages, the skin cancer can sometimes be cut out of the infected area, or radiation therapy may be needed. If left untreated, skin cancer can cause the spread of other cancers throughout the cat's body and eventually lead to a very painful death.



The pictures above are of a cat with severe skin cancer. The cancer has spread throughout the body causing the cat to lose his sense of smell and taste. As cats rely on their sense of smell to eat, this cat began to starve. Unfortunately, the cancer spread so much in this cat he was unable to be treated. He was only three years old.

At Cat Protection we have taken in cats as young as 12 months who required surgery to remove skin cancer on their ear tips and/or nose.

How can I prevent skin cancer in my cat?

As sunburn is one of the major causes of the development of skin cancer, it is important to prevent it. White cats and cats with light-coloured noses, ears, or eyelids should be kept inside all the time, or at least during the hottest parts of the day (11am – 4pm).

Pet sunscreens can be applied to the cat's ears and nose if they do go outside but **do not use human sunscreen as it is toxic to cats**. Pet sunscreen needs to be re-applied regularly to maintain effectiveness: check the packaging for directions. Pet sunscreen is available from vets, Cat Protection, or good pet stores. Your cat can also become sunburnt through some types of glass, so you may need to use sunscreen even for indoor cats.

It is important to keep in mind that skin cancer can also be hereditary, as with humans, and as we are unable to tell in most cases if the cats family had skin cancer it is important that we do our best to avoid them getting sunburn.

What are the signs of sunburn and skin cancer?

If you notice any of the following you should contact your vet as soon as possible:

- Reddening of the skin
- Flaky skin on the ears, eyes, or nose
- Sores on the ears, eyes, or nose, or lesions which may look like a scratch
- Hair loss on ears, eyes, or nose
- Over-grooming or scratching on these areas
- Black discolouration around the ear tips (especially on all white cats)

Early intervention may save your cat's life. Make sure you regularly check your cat's ears, eyes, and nose for the signs of sunburn and take them to the vet for a check up if you suspect they have been sunburnt.

All cats are different and while some cats with pale features may never develop skin cancer, others may. It is best to try and prevent sunburn and in turn skin cancer than run the risk of your cat needing surgery or worse.

The Australian sun can be very harsh, so all cats are at some risk. Make sure you take your cat to the vet at least once a year for a full-health check.

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