Feline Juvenile Periodontitis

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Feline oral inflammatory diseases are a fairly common occurrence. They can also be very frustrating to treat. Many practitioners are aware of stomatitis, however there is an emerging condition called juvenile periodontitis which is often mistaken for stomatitis. This newsletter will explain this condition and how to differentiate from stomatitis. Finally, treatment will be covered.

Clinical Features:
Juvenile periodontitis appears as significant gingival inflammation, often with gingival enlargement. (Figure 1) This begins soon after eruption of the permanent teeth (9-12 months of age). Bleeding during mastication and on oral exam are common findings. It is generally a non-painful condition for the patient, and halitosis is a common complaint. If left untreated, it typically proceeds quickly to marked periodontal disease, which may result in early exfoliation of the teeth. This is generally the worst in around the mandibular first molars. (Figure 2)

This disease is commonly mistaken for caudal stomatitis. The distinguishing clinical sign is the lack of caudal inflammation in this disease process. (Figure 3) In addition, patients with caudal stomatitis tend to be painful. Finally, it is rare for cats under 2 to develop stomatitis. (Figure 4) As the patient matures, susceptibility appears to subside at approximately two years of age, which is the same type of pattern followed in the human disease. Ergo, if this process is treated aggressively early on, the patient may enjoy normal periodontal health in the future.
Management:
Early (9 months of age) and frequent (q 6-9 months) dental prophylaxis (even if only minimal plaque is present) along with strict homecare is critical to decrease inflammation. Ideally, homecare consists of daily brushing, as it is the gold standard of plaque control. Other homecare alternatives include chlorhexidine rinses as well as plaque control diets and treats. In cases where gingival hyperplasia is present, early gingivectomy is recommended to remove pseudopockets, decrease inflammation, and facilitate plaque control (both professional and homecare). Dental radiographs should be performed to evaluate the quality of the alveolar bone and also for early tooth resorption. Extraction of any significantly diseased teeth is warranted to decrease the degree of inflammation.

Key Points
- Juvenile periodontal disease occurs in cats less than 1 year of age, is generally non-painful and halitosis is a common sign.
- Caudal stomatitis is painful and generally seen in older cats.
- The key clinical sign that differentiates these two conditions is the lack of caudal inflammation in Juvenile periodontitis.
- Juvenile periodontal disease involves severe periodontal inflammation which occurs during and immediately after eruption of the permanent dentition.
- Treatment and management of this problem includes early (and regular) professional plaque control (dental prophylaxis), gingivectomy (if indicated), and strict homecare.
- With proper therapy, susceptibility may subside at about two years of age.