

Nasopharyngeal Polyp

A COMMON, TREATABLE CONDITION IN CATS

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Cats are generally remarkably healthy animals - especially compared to their canine counterparts! However, there are some diseases, injuries, and conditions that are much more common in cats. One such condition is a nasopharyngeal polyp.

Nasopharyngeal polyp sounds like a pretty complicated problem, but really, these little polyps are simply masses of tissue that are found in the back of a cat's throat, the middle ear, or the Eustachian tube, which connects the middle ear to the throat. A nasopharyngeal polyp is not cancerous, and it is thought that they might form as a secondary reaction to feline respiratory viruses, however the exact cause of the polyps is unknown. Young adult cats are the most likely to be affected by nasopharyngeal polyps, but they can appear in cats of any age. In many cases these polyps can be hard to diagnose, and since cats are very good at hiding illness or injury, trying to diagnose anything can be a challenge - especially trying to diagnose an already tricky nasopharyngeal polyp! Until the polyp grows large enough, most owners will not even know that their pet is affected by these polyps. Once the polyp gets to a large enough size to affect the cat, symptoms such as sneezing, gagging, difficulty swallowing, difficulty breathing, loud breathing, and nasal discharge can be observed. Some cats will also exhibit signs of ear infections if the polyp is growing into

the ear instead of the throat. These warning signs are also common in some other feline conditions, so make sure and check with your family veterinarian as soon as you see any of these symptoms!

In order to fully evaluate many nasopharyngeal polyps, the patient may need to be anesthetized for an oral exam. Some cats will even need advanced diagnostics, such as a radiograph (x-ray) or CT scan,



to assess the extent of the polyp. This is particularly important in cases where there is a concern that the polyp is within the middle ear. Once the extent of the polyp has been determined, surgery can be discussed. In most cases to ensure that the polyp does not return after removal, a surgeon will perform a ventral bulla osteotomy. This means that the surgeon would remove bone around the middle ear, in order to fully remove the polyp from the

base. It is important to remove the base of the polyp because if a nasopharyngeal polyp is removed but the base of the mass remains, it is possible for the polyp to regrow. Ventral bulla osteotomies are delicate, complex procedures, and a consultation with a board-certified surgeon should be considered if your pet is diagnosed with a nasopharyngeal polyp and surgical treatment is recommended by your family veterinarian.

Most cats do very well after ventral bulla osteotomies, and recovery is generally uneventful. There are several significant structures in the area around the middle ear, however, and it is not uncommon for patients to develop a condition called Horner's syndrome post-operatively. With patients affected by Horner's syndrome, the cat's third eyelid is elevated and visible, and often the patient's pupils will be different sizes. Additionally, some patients will experience balance issues, a head tilt, or wobbliness because of the inflammation of the inner ear post-operatively, which helps control balance. These post-operative complications are typically temporary, and most patients do extremely well with surgical treatment of nasopharyngeal polyps.

Nasopharyngeal polyps can seem overwhelming, but they are very treatable! If your feline friend has been diagnosed with a nasopharyngeal polyp, check with your family veterinarian to see if a consultation with a board-certified surgeon is right for you.