

*I have a big macho tomcat that I rescued off the street 18 months ago. He is constantly getting into fights with the street cats that hang around the bins by our villa. Usually his wounds scab over and heal quite quickly, but he has one on his cheek from around four days ago that is now swollen and painful to touch. Do I need to take him to the vet?*

*Louise Walters, Abu Dhabi*

It sounds to me like your macho tomcat finally met his match and has developed an abscess as a result! A bite from another cat allows bacteria to be injected into the underlying tissues. The initial skin wound then heals rapidly, permitting the bacteria to multiply beneath the skin and resulting in an infected pocket of pus. The overlying skin becomes hot and swollen and the cat usually becomes depressed, febrile, and disinterested in food.

Your tomcat needs to visit his vet to confirm the diagnosis. An abscess is treated by lancing it and flushing out the pus and bacteria. If it is a sizeable abscess, this will require him to be sedated. After flushing the abscess is left open to allow further drainage and your cat prescribed antibiotics to prevent reoccurrence and resolve the abscess.

You should be aware that the street cat population of Abu Dhabi carries the feline immunodeficiency virus (feline AIDS), which is spread through bite wounds. You can request your vet test for this. If the cat is FIV-negative I would strongly recommend you neuter him to make him less inclined to roam and fight with other entire tomcats, or consider keeping him solely indoors.

Dr Rachel Shaw can only answer questions through this column. If you have a question, please email [petdocrach@hotmail.com](mailto:petdocrach@hotmail.com)

[Originally published in Abu Dhabi Week vol 2 issue 22]