Lymphadenitis, Lymphadenopathy & Swollen Lymph Nodes in Cats

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The term 'lymphadenopathy' refers to enlarged lymph nodes. Lymph nodes can be enlarged for many reasons including infections and cancers. 'Lymphadenitis' is the term used to describe lymph nodes which are enlarged due to infection or inflammation. Lymphadenitis is a non-cancerous condition. When an infection occurs, often the lymph nodes in the area adjacent to the infection become enlarged and inflamed. For instance, if a cat has an infection of the gums, then commonly the lymph node closest to the infection will be enlarged, i.e., the submandibular lymph nodes (lymph nodes near the neck) and/or tonsils.

What are the symptoms?

With lymphadenitis, enlargement of one or more lymph nodes is the most common sign. Usually, with an infection, an elevated temperature is also present. Other signs depend on the area involved. For instance, a cat with a sore throat may also cough, drool, swallow repeatedly, and be reluctant to eat. Some of these signs could be caused by the enlarged lymph nodes interfering with swallowing. If an infection occurs in a rear foot, the lymph nodes further up the leg would be enlarged. Limping may occur not only because the foot is sore, but also because the nodes may be painful and muscle movement increases the discomfort.

What are the risks?

Lymphadenitis is usually not serious; assuming the infection is diagnosed and curable. In most cases, once the infection is cleared, the enlarged lymph nodes will return to normal size.

What is the management?

The cause of the enlarged lymph node must be determined. If a bacterial infection is present, antibiotics will help fight the disease. If a fungal infection is causing the enlarged lymph nodes, then antifungal medications must be given. As one can see, it is very important to first determine the cause, then select the proper treatment.

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