

Ralph

Ralph is a 2 year old ginger domestic short hair cat who was adopted by his owners while they were on holiday in Mauritius!!

In November 2016, Ralph was a stray kitten living on the street in Mauritius. While his now owner was on holiday there, Ralph made a beeline for her and stole her heart by climbing up onto her lap for some fuss and a cuddle. When he started making unusual noises while eating, he was taken by taxi to a local vets who treated him at their clinic and had plans to release him back into the wild.....luckily for Ralph, his new owner was smitten and so arrangements were made for him to be flown to the UK. Ralph landed at Heathrow in January 2017.



Ralph initially came in to see us back in January 2017. He had been in the UK for a week and his new owner had noticed that his mouth was painful. On examination, Ralph had a severe case of gingivitis (inflamed gums) which was making him very uncomfortable and unfortunately stopping him from eating.

We started treatment with some pain relief and an antibiotic injection, which made him much more comfortable. Shortly afterwards, Ralph came back in to be sedated so that we could take a better look inside his mouth and obtain some samples to send to the lab to find out the underlying cause of his sore mouth.

When the lab results came back we had confirmation that there was a virus causing Ralph's oral problems.....Feline Calicivirus.

Now that we had a probable cause for Ralph's poorly mouth we set about finding a long term treatment to alleviate the discomfort. Antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medication were a starting point for Ralph's treatment. In addition to this, he was also given a

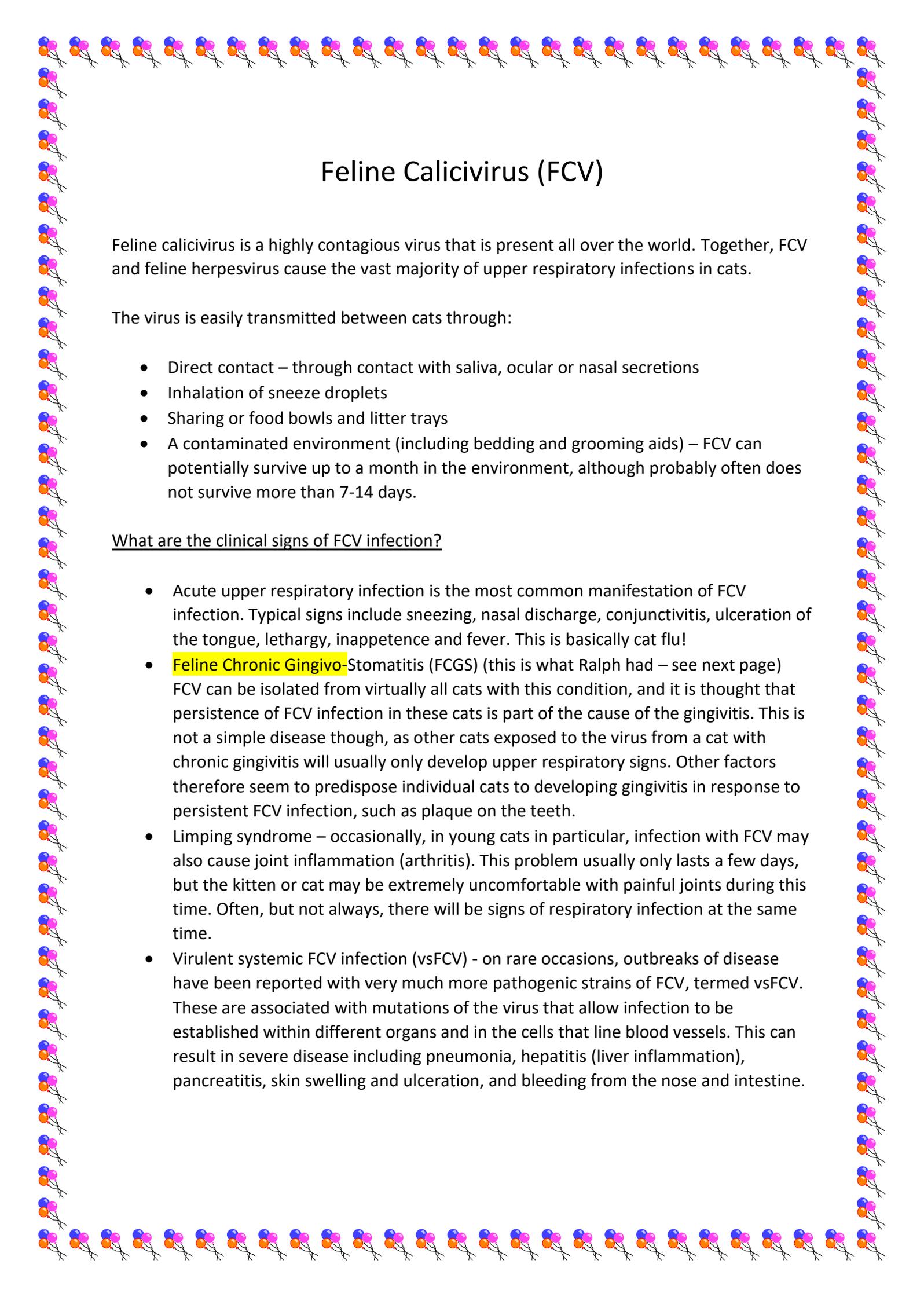
medication called Atopica which counteracts the immune system's over-reaction to the virus that causes such severe inflammation.

The next stage of Ralph's treatment was to reduce the build-up of plaque in the mouth which was done by cleaning his teeth under general anaesthetic and also removing the worst affected teeth that were not saveable. This may sound extreme, but in cases like Ralph's the daily task of teeth brushing to reduce plaque can be a very painful experience, and is consequently impossible.

Unfortunately his relief was short lived and just a few months after his dental procedure Ralph was back with a sore mouth once again and not wanting to eat. Antibiotics and pain relief were one again administered but the decision was made to remove the remainder of Ralph's teeth under general anaesthetic. Full dental extraction is a radical and thankfully rarely necessary way of treating this disease, but it is usually very effective. The procedure went well and initially Ralph showed signs of improvement. Yet again unfortunately, improvement was short lived and he was soon back with his sore mouth!

At this point Ralph was not really eating and his owner was unable to give him his medication due to his mouth feeling so sore. Knowing that time and reliably getting the medication in should sort the problem, there was little option but to place a feeding tube under anaesthesia through the side of the neck. This type of feeding tube is called an oesophageal feeding tube (or o-tube for short) and can be used for longer term feeding and medicating, bypassing the mouth and in this case giving the gums some time to heal. Ralph had his feeding tube in place for nearly seven weeks and by the time it was removed his mouth was looking much better. His appetite and general demeanour were improved too! We are now 2 months beyond o-tube removal, Ralph is off all medication and his mouth has finally settled down to normal. We do not expect it to flare up again, and apart from being a little gummy, Ralph is a very happy cat again!





Feline Calicivirus (FCV)

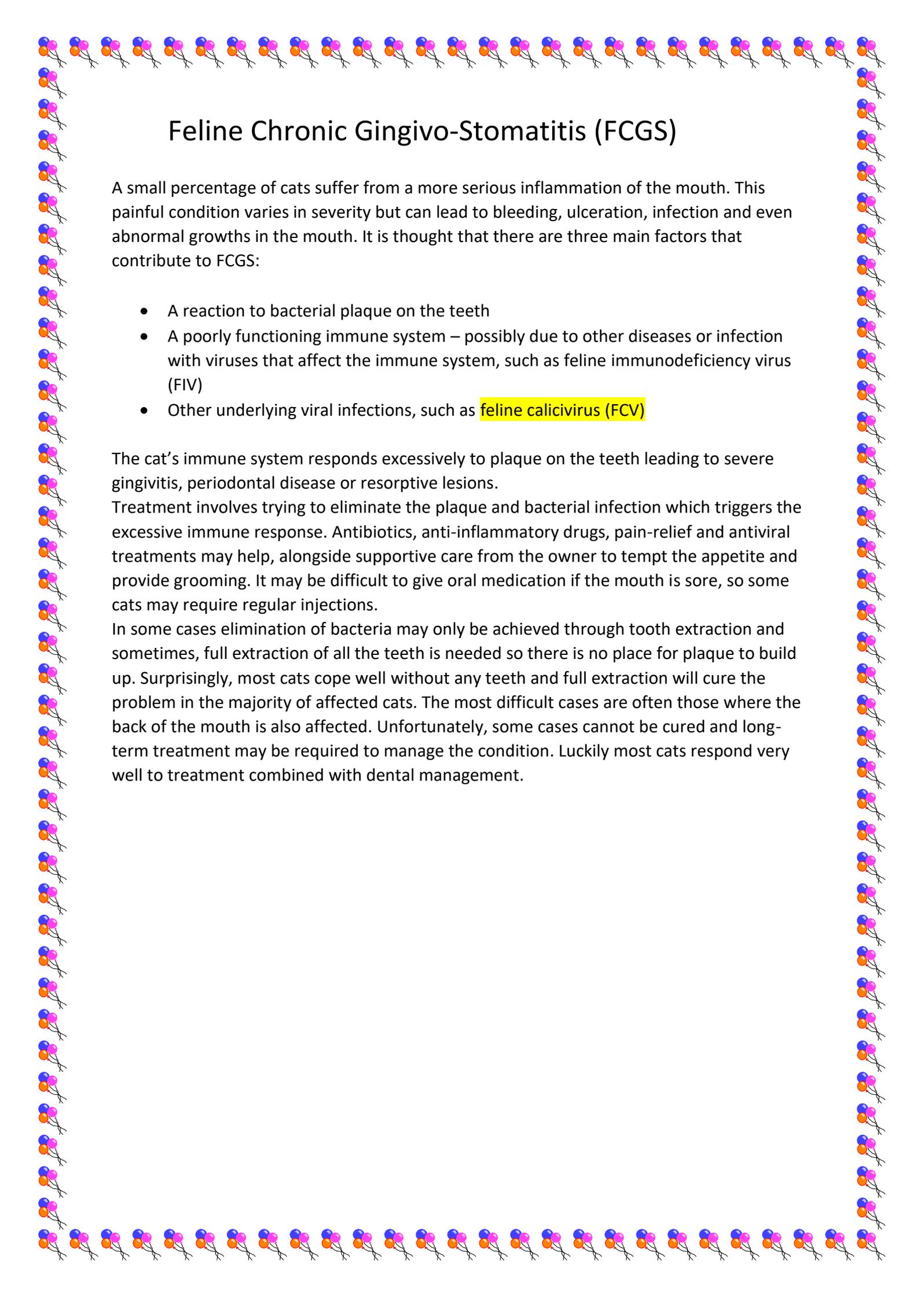
Feline calicivirus is a highly contagious virus that is present all over the world. Together, FCV and feline herpesvirus cause the vast majority of upper respiratory infections in cats.

The virus is easily transmitted between cats through:

- Direct contact – through contact with saliva, ocular or nasal secretions
- Inhalation of sneeze droplets
- Sharing of food bowls and litter trays
- A contaminated environment (including bedding and grooming aids) – FCV can potentially survive up to a month in the environment, although probably often does not survive more than 7-14 days.

What are the clinical signs of FCV infection?

- Acute upper respiratory infection is the most common manifestation of FCV infection. Typical signs include sneezing, nasal discharge, conjunctivitis, ulceration of the tongue, lethargy, inappetence and fever. This is basically cat flu!
- **Feline Chronic Gingivo**-Stomatitis (FCGS) (this is what Ralph had – see next page) FCV can be isolated from virtually all cats with this condition, and it is thought that persistence of FCV infection in these cats is part of the cause of the gingivitis. This is not a simple disease though, as other cats exposed to the virus from a cat with chronic gingivitis will usually only develop upper respiratory signs. Other factors therefore seem to predispose individual cats to developing gingivitis in response to persistent FCV infection, such as plaque on the teeth.
- Limping syndrome – occasionally, in young cats in particular, infection with FCV may also cause joint inflammation (arthritis). This problem usually only lasts a few days, but the kitten or cat may be extremely uncomfortable with painful joints during this time. Often, but not always, there will be signs of respiratory infection at the same time.
- Virulent systemic FCV infection (vsFCV) - on rare occasions, outbreaks of disease have been reported with very much more pathogenic strains of FCV, termed vsFCV. These are associated with mutations of the virus that allow infection to be established within different organs and in the cells that line blood vessels. This can result in severe disease including pneumonia, hepatitis (liver inflammation), pancreatitis, skin swelling and ulceration, and bleeding from the nose and intestine.



Feline Chronic Gingivo-Stomatitis (FCGS)

A small percentage of cats suffer from a more serious inflammation of the mouth. This painful condition varies in severity but can lead to bleeding, ulceration, infection and even abnormal growths in the mouth. It is thought that there are three main factors that contribute to FCGS:

- A reaction to bacterial plaque on the teeth
- A poorly functioning immune system – possibly due to other diseases or infection with viruses that affect the immune system, such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)
- Other underlying viral infections, such as **feline calicivirus (FCV)**

The cat's immune system responds excessively to plaque on the teeth leading to severe gingivitis, periodontal disease or resorptive lesions.

Treatment involves trying to eliminate the plaque and bacterial infection which triggers the excessive immune response. Antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, pain-relief and antiviral treatments may help, alongside supportive care from the owner to tempt the appetite and provide grooming. It may be difficult to give oral medication if the mouth is sore, so some cats may require regular injections.

In some cases elimination of bacteria may only be achieved through tooth extraction and sometimes, full extraction of all the teeth is needed so there is no place for plaque to build up. Surprisingly, most cats cope well without any teeth and full extraction will cure the problem in the majority of affected cats. The most difficult cases are often those where the back of the mouth is also affected. Unfortunately, some cases cannot be cured and long-term treatment may be required to manage the condition. Luckily most cats respond very well to treatment combined with dental management.