

# iMedix: Your Personal Health Advisor.

## Cat scratch disease

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### Overview

Cat scratch disease (CSD) is a bacterial infection that humans can get after being scratched or bitten by a cat. The bacteria responsible for the infection is called *Bartonella henselae*. The condition is typically mild and often resolves on its own, but it can cause more serious symptoms, especially in individuals with weakened immune systems. The infection is most commonly associated with kittens, as they are more likely to carry the bacteria.

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### What is it

Cat scratch disease is an infection caused by a bacteria found in cats, often spread through scratches or bites. It usually causes mild symptoms, like swollen lymph nodes, but can sometimes lead to more serious health issues.

### Causes:

Cat scratch disease is caused by the *Bartonella henselae* bacteria, which can be transmitted to humans through:

- **Scratches or Bites from Infected Cats:** - Cats, especially kittens, can carry the bacteria in their claws or mouth, and transmit it through scratches or bites.
- **Flea Bites on Cats:** - Cats often become infected with the bacteria through flea bites, which can then be passed on to humans.
- **Touching Cat Saliva:** - The bacteria can enter a person's body if they touch their eyes, mouth, or an open wound after contact with a cat's saliva.

### Risk Factors:

Certain individuals are at higher risk of developing cat scratch disease, such as:

- **Children and Young Adults:** - Children, especially those under 15, are more likely to be scratched or bitten while playing with cats, increasing their risk of infection.
  - **People with Multiple Cats:** - Those who live with several cats, especially kittens, are at a higher risk due to frequent exposure.
  - **Immunocompromised Individuals:** - People with weakened immune systems, such as those with HIV/AIDS or undergoing chemotherapy, are at greater risk of developing more severe symptoms of CSD.
  - **Individuals with Flea-Infested Cats:** - Cats that have fleas are more likely to carry the *Bartonella henselae* bacteria, which increases the risk for their owners.
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### How does it manifest

### Main Symptoms:

The symptoms of cat scratch disease usually develop within 3 to 14 days after a scratch or bite. Common signs include:

- **Swollen Lymph Nodes:** - The most common symptom is swelling of the lymph nodes, particularly around the site of the scratch or bite. These swollen nodes can become tender or painful.
- **Fever:** - A mild fever may develop as the body fights off the infection.
- **Fatigue:** - Many people experience general tiredness and lack of energy.
- **Red Bump at the Scratch Site:** - A small, red bump or blister may appear at the site of the scratch or bite and could be the first sign of infection.
- **Headaches or Body Aches:** - Some individuals may experience headaches or body aches as part of their symptoms.

### Important Signals:

While cat scratch disease is usually mild, certain symptoms may indicate more severe complications and require immediate medical attention:

- **High Fever or Chills:** - A high, persistent fever can be a sign that the infection is spreading.
  - **Severe Swelling of Lymph Nodes:** - If the lymph nodes become excessively swollen or tender, this could indicate a more serious infection.
  - **Vision Problems or Eye Pain:** - In rare cases, cat scratch disease can affect the eyes and cause blurry vision, pain, or sensitivity to light.
  - **Persistent Fatigue or Weakness:** - If tiredness or weakness continues for an extended period, it may suggest the infection is not resolving on its own.
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## Diagnosis and Treatment

### Diagnosis Process:

Diagnosing cat scratch disease typically involves a combination of medical history, physical examination, and laboratory tests:

- **Medical History and Physical Exam:** - A doctor will ask about recent contact with cats, particularly scratches or bites, and check for swollen lymph nodes or other common symptoms.
- **Blood Tests:** - A blood test may be used to confirm the presence of *Bartonella henselae* antibodies, indicating an active infection.
- **Biopsy of Swollen Lymph Node:** - In rare cases, if the diagnosis is unclear or if symptoms persist, a biopsy of the swollen lymph node may be taken to rule out other conditions.

### Treatment Options:

Most cases of cat scratch disease are mild and resolve without treatment. However, in cases where symptoms are severe or persistent, treatment options include:

- **Antibiotics:** - If the infection is more severe, antibiotics such as azithromycin, doxycycline, or ciprofloxacin may be prescribed to help clear the bacteria.
- **Pain Relief:** - Over-the-counter pain relievers, like ibuprofen or acetaminophen, can help reduce fever and ease pain associated with swollen lymph nodes.
- **Lymph Node Drainage:** - In cases where lymph nodes are excessively swollen and painful, a doctor may drain the lymph nodes to relieve discomfort and reduce swelling.

### Immediate Actions:

If you suspect you have cat scratch disease, take the following steps:

- **Consult a Doctor** - If you notice swollen lymph nodes, a red bump at the scratch site, or other symptoms after being scratched or bitten by a cat, seek medical advice.
  - **Monitor Symptoms** - Keep an eye on any signs of infection, such as worsening swelling, fever, or fatigue, and follow up with your doctor if symptoms persist.
  - **Complete Prescribed Treatment** - If antibiotics are prescribed, it's essential to complete the entire course to ensure the infection is fully cleared.
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## Prevention

### Risk Reduction Strategies:

To lower the risk of contracting cat scratch disease, consider the following prevention tips:

- **Wash Cat Scratches and Bites Immediately:** - Clean any scratches or bites with soap and water as soon as they occur to reduce the risk of infection.
- **Avoid Rough Play with Cats:** - Roughhousing with cats, especially kittens, increases the likelihood of scratches and bites. Handle cats gently to minimize the risk of injury.
- **Control Fleas on Cats:** - Regular flea control treatments for your cat can reduce the chances of them carrying the *Bartonella henselae* bacteria.
- **Practice Good Hygiene:** - Wash your hands after handling cats, especially before touching your face or any open wounds.

### Prevention Possibilities:

Additional preventive measures can further reduce the likelihood of cat scratch disease:

- **Keep Cats Indoors:** - Indoor cats are less likely to come into contact with fleas or other sources of infection, lowering the risk of them carrying the bacteria.
  - **Educate Children on Handling Cats:** - Teach children how to play safely with cats and to avoid rough interactions that may lead to scratches or bites.
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## FAQs

- **Can cat scratch disease kill you?:**  
Cat scratch disease is rarely fatal. In most cases, it causes mild to moderate symptoms like fever, swollen lymph nodes, and localized infection. However, in people with weakened immune systems, such as those with HIV/AIDS or undergoing chemotherapy, the infection can become more severe and lead to complications. Death from cat scratch disease is extremely rare.
- **How do you get cat scratch disease?:**  
Cat scratch disease is caused by the bacterium *Bartonella henselae*, which is transmitted to humans through a scratch or bite from an infected cat, or when cat saliva comes into contact with broken skin or the eyes. Cats often become carriers of the bacteria through flea bites, but they generally do not show symptoms themselves.
- **What does cat scratch disease look like?:**  
The early signs of cat scratch disease include a small bump or blister at the site of the scratch or bite, followed by swollen and tender lymph nodes near the area of the injury. The affected lymph nodes may appear red and feel warm. Some people may also experience fever, fatigue, and body aches.

- **Is cat scratch disease contagious?:**

No, cat scratch disease is not contagious from person to person. The disease is transmitted from cats to humans, usually through a scratch, bite, or contact with cat saliva. While infected humans may develop symptoms, they cannot pass the infection directly to others.

- **How long does cat scratch disease last?:**

Cat scratch disease usually lasts anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Most cases resolve on their own without treatment, though swollen lymph nodes may persist for a longer time. In more severe cases, especially in people with compromised immune systems, symptoms may last longer and require antibiotic treatment.

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## **Additional Information**

**Where to Find More Information:** For more detailed information on cat scratch disease, prevention, and treatment options, consider the following trusted resources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): The CDC provides comprehensive information on cat scratch disease, including prevention tips and treatment guidelines. Visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP): AAFP offers helpful advice on how to manage and prevent cat scratch disease, especially for families with children. Visit [www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org). Mayo Clinic: The Mayo Clinic provides expert insights into cat scratch disease symptoms, causes, and treatments. Visit [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org). **Support and Resources:** If you or a loved one has cat scratch disease, there are resources available to help: **Online Health Communities:** Websites like PatientsLikeMe and HealthUnlocked offer forums where individuals can connect, share experiences, and find support for managing cat scratch disease. **Local Health Departments:** Many local health departments provide education on zoonotic diseases like cat scratch disease, and they may offer community outreach programs for pet owners. By accessing these resources, individuals can stay informed and receive support in managing cat scratch disease.

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## **Conclusion**

Cat scratch disease is a generally mild infection caused by bacteria that can be transmitted through scratches or bites from cats. While it usually resolves on its own, prompt diagnosis and treatment are important, especially for those with weakened immune systems. By taking simple preventive measures—such as avoiding rough play with cats, keeping cats indoors, and managing flea infestations—individuals can reduce their risk of infection. Maintaining good hygiene and monitoring symptoms after contact with cats are essential steps to protect against cat scratch disease. By staying informed and seeking medical advice when needed, individuals can manage and prevent the infection effectively.

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## **References**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Cat Scratch Disease Information. Available at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP): Cat Scratch Disease Overview and Management. Available at: [www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org) Mayo Clinic: Cat Scratch Disease Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment. Available at: [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org) PatientsLikeMe: Online Community for Individuals Managing Cat Scratch Disease. Available at: [www.patientslikeme.com](http://www.patientslikeme.com) HealthUnlocked: Online Support for Various Health Conditions, Including Cat Scratch Disease. Available at: [www.healthunlocked.com](http://www.healthunlocked.com) These references provide reliable information and resources for understanding and managing cat scratch disease.

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