

LICK GRANULOMA

What is a lick granuloma?

Also known as **acral lick dermatitis**, this problem begins as an area of hair loss and reddened skin most commonly on the top of the wrist or carpal joint on the front legs. It often looks like a “hot spot”. These differ from “hot spots” in that they persist despite treatment. They are often associated with chronic, persistent licking, especially when the pet is alone or when the family is sleeping.

Is there any breed disposition?

The condition occurs mainly in medium to large breeds, particularly Dobermans, Great Danes, Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and Irish Setters. However, it is important to remember that any breed may develop acral lick dermatitis.

What is the cause?

The exact cause of acral lick dermatitis is unknown. Psychological factors such as stress or boredom may initiate the condition. It should be noted that although it can occur on the hind limbs, the anterior and lateral aspects (top and outside surfaces) of the forelimbs are most commonly affected. These are areas that the dog can constantly lick while lying in a normal position. The chronic nature of the condition is often associated with a deep bacterial infection. It is important to distinguish between psychological and physiological causes in order to provide the proper treatment. Most dogs require treatment aimed at the inflammation, infection and psychological components for resolution.



How is it diagnosed?

The site and appearance of the lesion is a major guide to diagnosis. Skin biopsies are often taken if there is no response to treatment or to rule out other causes such as mange or tumor. The underlying joint may be radiographed to determine if arthritis is present.

What is the treatment?

The treatment will vary depending on your pet's condition. Long term antibiotics, topical and oral anti-inflammatory medications, low-wattage laser therapy and psychoactive medications are some of the more common treatments for acral lick dermatitis. Most pets will benefit from increased aerobic activity and decreased caloric intake. Since the root cause is often related to anxiety or boredom, increasing interaction and stimulation are often strongly recommended. While frustrating, most cases of acral lick granuloma can be successfully treated if the owner is willing to pursue extended tests and treatments.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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