



Acral Lick Dermatitis (Lick Granuloma)

Acral lick dermatitis usually appears as one or more well defined, raised, hairless plaques. They are usually seen on the limbs. They are caused by the dog repeatedly licking one specific area of the skin. Treatment can be frustrating as lick granulomas can be very slow to heal, and often the dog can undo many weeks of hard work by licking all over again!

Treatment is centred around two objectives:

1. To identify and treat the underlying causes
2. To provide treatment for the lick granuloma itself

Identify and treat the underlying cause

Sometimes there is a medical reason to explain why the dog has started licking at himself. Your vet will check these, for example:

Skin problems such as fleas and allergies
Pain such as arthritis or full scent glands

Your vet will fully examine your dog and treat these problems as necessary.

In many other cases there is a behavioural reason to explain why the dog has started licking, e.g. he is bored or anxious. This is always difficult to prove. Treatment might include the provision of more walks and games, more freedom, more human companionship, more canine companionship, more toys and the removal of obvious sources of stress. These measures are recommended in all cases of lick granuloma.

Providing treatment for the lick granuloma itself

1. Some kind of mechanical barrier must be provided to stop the dog licking at the lesions. Lick granulomas will never heal if the dog continues to lick. The most suitable barrier is usually an Elizabethan collar as it leaves the lick granuloma open to the air whilst preventing licking. Bandages and socks can also be used, but care must be taken to ensure that the dog does not simply start to lick another part of the body, and that the lick granulomas do not get sweaty and soggy underneath the bandage. Whichever method is chosen, it must be applied at all times, and should not be discontinued for at least two weeks after the granuloma has healed.
2. If there is evidence of infection of the affected skin, antibiotic tablets will be prescribed. In some cases very long courses of antibiotics are required and it is important that your dog completes the course.
3. In milder cases, and antibiotic/anti-inflammatory cream can be applied to the affected areas.

4. If there are significant behavioural problems causing the licking, certain psychological drugs can be prescribed. These tend to be used only as a last resort.

If medical management fails, it is sometimes possible to surgically remove the lick granuloma. However, there is often not enough spare skin to allow surgical removal, especially for those on the paws. It is also important to continue to above measures to make sure the dog does not immediately create a new lick granuloma at the site of the operation!

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