

Lick Granulomas

A lick granuloma is an open sore at the ankle or wrist perpetuated by constant licking. In most cases, the sore is preceded by an itchy skin condition such as a skin disease, demodectic mange, a bacterial or fungal infection, trauma, or underlying skin disease that starts the lick cycle.

The causing event focuses the dog's attention on the area. The licking then becomes a habit that may be continued by psychological events.

As the dog licks at the area, the hair is rubbed off and the surface of the skin becomes red and shiny. Eventually the skin becomes raised, thick and hard and insensitive to pressure. However, it always remains fresh looking from the constant licking.

It is important to review the course of events in an attempt to identify the precipitating cause. Once the underlying cause is identified, the medical treatment is directed toward that condition. Local treatment may involve any combination of the following depending on what the vet determines the cause to be: The use of topical and injectable steroids, topical or systemic antibiotics, surgical removal, cryotherapy, and radiation therapy.

The use of anti-itch sprays, bitter tasting sprays or ointments, bandages, and elizabethan collars, are also useful in helping to deter licking behavior.

Also because the lick granulomas are perpetuated by psychogenic factors, a change in the dogs routine or lifestyle should be part of the treatment program. For example making sure the dog always has company to prevent boredom (another dog or human), and/or behavior modification drugs might be beneficial in some cases.

The lick granuloma is unfortunately one of the most difficult skin problems to treat successfully.