



## Chastain Veterinary Medical Group Pet Health Fact Sheet

### Acral Lick Granulomas

#### **What is a lick granuloma?**

A lick granuloma is an open sore on the skin caused by and perpetuated by constant licking. It is generally located on one of the legs, or paws, especially near the carpus (wrist) joint. Typically, the hair will be licked off and the skin will be either raw and weeping or thickened, reddish, and scar-like.

Lick granulomas usually begin with an itching or tingling sensation on the leg from some cause or other. Insect bites, fleas, tiny splinters, pressure sores, boredom or almost any other process that causes a minor itching sensation may initiate the repetitive licking that leads to a lick granuloma. Regardless of the originating cause, the dog responds to it by licking. Often this serves only to further increase the itching or tingling. Very shortly, a vicious cycle develops, creating a habit much like a child sucking its thumb. Even if the problem that initiated the itching or tingling sensation is gone, the habit of licking continues.

#### **Are there certain breeds that are more likely to do this?**

Yes. German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers, Great Danes, Labrador Retrievers, and Irish Setters are reputed to be more likely to develop lick granulomas than other breeds, but it is possible in any breed. In addition, male dogs are twice as likely to do this when compared to female dogs.

#### **Why does a dog do this?**

Agreement has not been reached on the answer to this question. There are three basic views on the subject. Some see it as a primary skin disorder, some see it as a behavioral problem, and some see it as a neurological disease involving the nerves in the area. It is likely that most lick granulomas have more than one cause or a single cause with one or more contributing problems.

#### **How is this diagnosed and differentiated from other skin disorders?**

In most cases, the diagnosis is made based on the appearance and location of the sore, along with an owner-supplied history of licking at the affected area for some time. However, certain skin tumors, parasites, embedded foreign bodies, and allergies can create sores that look very similar. In addition, trauma that causes bone fractures or nerve injury can also lead to constant licking, creating a similar lesion. Therefore, skin scrapings, fungal cultures, fine needle aspiration cytology, radiographs (x-rays), and biopsies may be recommended.

**Chastain Veterinary Medical Group**

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