



Lick Granuloma (Acral Lick Dermatitis)

What is it?

Lick Granuloma is characterized by a thickened, hairless, oval, eroded or ulcerated area of the skin. It is usually located on a lower limb within easy reach of the dog's mouth.

Who gets them?

Any dog at any age can develop lick granulomas. However, the "classic" dog that develops a lick granuloma is a large breed, middle aged, male dog that doesn't have enough to occupy his mind and time.

Causes

There is no single cause for granulomas. Possibilities include infection, previous injury, allergy, joint disease, tumors, and behavioral addiction.

Possible scenarios which lead to lick granuloma formation are:

- Wound on leg -> dog licks wound -> wound enlarges -> licks more -> wound enlarges -> licks more -> wound thickens -> licks -> enlarges
- Dog is bored, frustrated or stressed -> licks leg for something to do -> creates wound -> licks more -> wound enlarges -> licks more -> wound thickens -> licks -> enlarges

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of lick granuloma is usually made by the history and the appearance of the wound. Other tests to rule out parasites, fungal infections, tumors or other problems may be indicated.

Why do they keep licking?

It is believed that the constant licking causes the release of chemicals called endorphins. These chemicals are the body's natural "feel better" drugs. They decrease pain and increase the feelings of happiness. Over time the dog becomes addicted to these feelings and licking becomes obsessive-compulsive behavior.

Treatment

Treatment of the wound itself as well as the emotional aspect of an obsessive-compulsive disorder needs to be addressed.

- More time being active with their human family
- Less time isolated or alone
- Exercise, exercise, exercise!
- Play dates with another dog or acquiring a second dog (no guarantee)
- Neutering if the dog is unneutered
- Medications to decrease anxiety (must be used in conjunction with lifestyle changes)

Prognosis

While it can be very difficult to completely resolve lick granulomas, they usually do not lead to the premature death of the pet. Addressing any underlying medical problems like allergies or arthritis will improve the comfort of the dog and aid in management of the granuloma.

