



## **ABOUT THE DISEASE**

*Acral lick dermatitis*, also known as a *lick granuloma*, is a self-induced skin lesion caused by excessive licking and chewing of the lower limbs primarily seen in canine patients. Typical appearance of a *lick granuloma* is a raised, red, hairless, oval patch of skin found over the front surface of one leg.

Several conditions that cause discomfort of the skin or allergic skin disease can cause persistent licking of the lower extremities. If any condition causing this persistent licking is left unmanaged, patients can progress to developing a secondary *acral lick dermatitis*.

Unfortunately, in some patients the underlying problems cannot always be found and may be caused by a behavioral disorder.

It is important to rule out other conditions like skin tumors and deep bacterial or fungal infections, which will complicate the success of treatment.

## **OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS**

Initially, skin scrapings, bacterial and fungal cultures, and skin biopsies may be required to determine underlying conditions or a confirmatory diagnosis.

In some cases, radiographs (x-rays) may be warranted to look for joint or bone disease such as arthritis or bone infections that can cause pain and therefore cause a dog to lick over the painful area incessantly.

## **TREATMENT**

Underlying infections or sources of pain need to be treated and managed to lessen stimulation to lick or chew.

The affected skin area can be treated directly with a variety of medications, including topical treatments and injections. Corticosteroids, dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), capsaicin, anti-inflammatory drugs, and antihistamines have all been used to help manage the symptoms.

Removal of the lesion with conventional surgery, laser surgery, or cryosurgery is also advocated by some veterinarians.

Behavioral components of the condition should be addressed as well. Boredom can be alleviated by increasing playtime, introducing another animal as a playmate, reducing confinement time, or keeping the pet occupied with toys such as those with openings for treats (e.g., Kong-type toys). Several behavioral modification training techniques can be used. Stressful conditions should be eliminated, when possible. Antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs may also be helpful in some dogs, and these can be prescribed by your veterinarian or a veterinarian specialized in behavioral medicine.

## **TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- Be persistent as patients may take weeks to months before they show improvement.
- One single treatment method is typically not adequate to treat and manage this disease.