

# Lick Granuloma

- A lick granuloma is a thickened, hairless area of skin that results from excessive, repetitive licking or chewing.
- Signs of a lick granuloma include brown-stained hair around the lesion and an area of thickened skin that may be inflamed, infected, or ulcerated.
- The lesions usually occur on the lower legs of dogs.
- Excessive licking may be caused by underlying conditions, such as allergies, mites, and infections, or may be from boredom or other behavioral problems.
- Diagnosis may require skin scrapes, skin cultures, biopsies (tissue samples), blood work, and/or radiographs (x-rays).
- Resolving the lesion requires treatment for the underlying condition or behavioral modification and/or medications.

### What Is a Lick Granuloma?

A lick granuloma is thickened, raised area of skin that is often hairless, inflamed, infected, or ulcerated, resulting from excessive, repetitive licking or chewing. These lesions are typically found on the lower legs, and may occur alone or on more than one limb.

Lick granulomas tend to occur in dogs more than cats, with a higher incidence in males than females. While lick granulomas may be seen on any dog, breeds with a higher incidence of this condition include Doberman pinschers, Labrador retrievers, Great Danes, German short-haired pointers, German shepherds, and Irish setters.

### What Are the Signs of a Lick Granuloma?

The hair around a lick granuloma is often a brownish-red color, caused by saliva staining (substances in saliva stain the fur when licking has been repetitive). The lesion itself is usually bald, and the skin often appears thickened, like scar tissue. The skin may be inflamed, infected, or have sores. Sometimes, the licking has been so severe that the skin is gradually removed and tendons and other structures under the skin are exposed. Pets with lick granulomas may limp on the affected limb.

### What Causes Lick Granulomas?

While the lick granuloma is caused by excessive licking, determining the cause of the licking can be a challenge. In some cases, an underlying disease or condition may cause the licking, or it may be a behavioral problem. Possible causes include:

- Allergies
- Mites
- Fungal or bacterial infection
- Foreign body under the skin
- Trauma
- Boredom
- Glandular disorder
- Underlying joint pain

### How Is This Condition Diagnosed?

A lick granuloma is usually diagnosed by the appearance of the lesion and a history of the dog licking or chewing at the area. To determine the cause of the licking, your veterinarian may perform a number of tests, including skin scrapes (gently scraping the surface of the skin with a dull instrument to identify mites), skin cultures, skin biopsies (tissue samples), and blood work. He or she may also recommend a radiograph (x-ray) to see if there is a foreign body under the skin or if there has been trauma to the bone or joint beneath the lesion.

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### How Is a Lick Granuloma Treated?

Treatment for lick granuloma can take many months and usually requires some patience. If an underlying condition has been identified, treatment of this condition should help resolve the granuloma.

## Common Conditions

Treatment may include medications such as antibiotics, antifungals, parasite treatment, antihistamines, pain medication, hormone supplements, or topical steroids.

Of course, preventing the pet from licking the area can help resolve the problem, as well. However, bandages, Elizabethan collars (a cone-shaped hood that fits over the head and prevents the pet from reaching his or her legs with the mouth), and bad-tasting substances can't always stop a pet that is determined to lick the area.

If your veterinarian believes that boredom is at the root of the licking problem, he or she may recommend increasing human interaction with the pet, the addition of another animal companion to the household, longer periods of exercise, or chew toys to distract the pet from the lesion. In some cases, behavioral medications, such as antidepressants, may be needed.

Because lick granulomas can be difficult to resolve and can have underlying causes, the problem can recur. Notify your veterinarian if your pet seems to be exhibiting the behavior again.