

A Fast-Acting, Nontoxic Treatment for Miserable Lick Granulomas

Pets who obsessively lick one spot on their bodies are often diagnosed with this stubborn, frustrating disorder, and then the long journey begins to find the cause and an effective treatment.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Lick granuloma is a condition in which a pet obsessively licks a spot, usually on a leg, until the hair is gone and a sore appears
- There are many underlying causes of lick granulomas, and it can be a long, frustrating process to determine the cause(s) and best treatment(s)
- Low level laser therapy shows tremendous promise as a fast, nontoxic treatment for lick granuloma, but more research is needed to determine the best way to perform laser treatments

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Have you ever known a dog or cat who keeps lick, lick, licking at one spot and will not stop? Sometimes it's triggered by a skin irritation. Sometimes it starts as a scrape or injury. Often, there doesn't seem to be a trigger at all.

These poor uncomfortable pets seem obsessed. They keep licking until all the fur is gone and then continue until the skin starts to go. They rip through bandages almost as fast as you can put them on. If you put one of those big lampshade-type collars on them, they either find a way to lick in spite of the collar, or they rub the bothersome area up against furniture or across the floor.

You literally have to tear the animal away from her foot (or wherever the problem is). It's amazing how strong a fluffy little creature can be when she wants to get back to licking that sore — that sore that has turned into a lick granuloma.

Lick Granuloma: A Very Common, Very Frustrating Condition

Lick granuloma is a condition in which a pet, most often a dog, continues to lick a single spot (usually on a leg) until all the hair is gone and a perpetual sore develops.

All veterinarians have seen these cases. And all veterinarians know that what used to be the magic answer for a lick granuloma stops working sooner or later. We all know that whatever the most common cause of these things is in a given area, we can't count on it to always be the cause. If the pet or the vet moves to a new area, we start all over again looking for the cause and the best cure.

Veterinarians are taught to diagnose disorders before treating them so that we can be sure we're using the treatment most likely to work. Something that works for a lick granuloma caused by "A" can make the sore worse if it is caused by "B". We start with tests for the most common causes of the condition and move on to tests for less common causes if necessary. As your pet's veterinarian, we're as frustrated as you are.

Causes of Lick Granuloma

Lick granuloma is often difficult to treat, and treatment that is successful in one dog does not always work for other dogs. There can be a single cause, or multiple causes, and sooner or later infection can exacerbate the problem.

Often there is a behavior component because many dogs become obsessed with the sore, or they are anxious and lick the sore just like some people chew their fingernails to the quick when they feel anxious. Other causes of a lick granuloma can include:

- A deep-seated bacterial infection that doesn't respond to short-term antibiotic therapy
- Arthritis of a joint far away from the sore
- A superficial bacterial infection that is sometimes better treated topically
- Stress from loss of another pet in the family
- A **yeast infection** that can't be treated with antibiotics
- **Allergies**
- Arthritis of a joint near the sore
- Nerve damage or disc disease in the back and/or the neck

There are so many potential causes for lick granuloma that if you own enough dogs, sooner or later you'll probably be dealing with this condition.

Typical Treatments for Lick Granulomas

If your pet has a lick granuloma, your veterinarian will want to do some testing. Probably lots of testing. We really want to try to find out what's underlying the problem before we try to treat it.

If your vet finds a probable cause, but the treatment for that cause doesn't work, there's a chance there is more than one cause, calling for more than one treatment.

The approach in conventional veterinary medicine has been to diagnose as many contributing causes as possible, and then use a combination of treatments to address the issue. These conventional treatments include:

- Drugs that help anxiety
- Drugs that help pain
- Drugs that help inflammation
- Drugs that help infections
- Narcotic antagonists

- Surgery

Even with all those treatments, lick granulomas are still a big problem for veterinarians trying to treat them. If you've ever known a dog with the condition, you know how frustrating and costly it can be. Even when you add integrative medicine, including perhaps acupuncture, herbs, chiropractic, and/or homeopathy, there will always be some poor dog out there who still is suffering.

Laser Therapy Research Can Give Us a Better, Faster Treatment

Low Level Laser Therapy (LLLT), also known as cold laser therapy, has been helpful for many pets with lick granuloma. But, there is no research to support its use — just reports that it seems to help.

Some people think we should just go ahead and try it and forget the lack of research. But if we do that, we are going in blind. The first low level laser treatment was pioneered in the late 1960s, almost as a mistake.

The researcher was trying to destroy cancers with lasers but the laser power was too low. Instead, it helped mice heal faster from surgical wounds. The researcher didn't get what he was looking for, but he found a way to help mice.

The problem is that if we just guess at the dose, we have no systematic way of testing the proper wavelength, intensity, duration, or timing of treatments. What we're left with are a lot of anecdotal stories. My way worked for me, your way worked for you ... but we're trying to compare apples to oranges.

Formal scientific research will help us determine whether laser therapy really does work, how often to treat, what type of cold laser to use, and what setting is appropriate.

A research project has been presented to the AHVM Foundation that will answer whether laser therapy helps, how often it should be done, and whether the safest low-intensity laser is beneficial. The laser therapy researchers have already had some success and want to continue testing to see if their results hold.

With a successful project, thousands of veterinarians, conventional as well as holistic, will have the support they need to start using laser therapy. All we're missing is the money to fund the research.

If you have ever had a pet with an uncomfortable, persistent, and seemingly incurable skin disease, now is the time to open your heart and help us support this project. Help us find a better, faster treatment for lick granulomas. There is a good chance that you or someone you know will have a pet that will be helped by this. Shine a light on health!

How You Can Help

At **AHVMF.org**, you can also read amazing stories of animals who have been healed with holistic medicine, as well as stories of animal teachers. There's also a blog that reports on some of the projects the foundation is working on. If you have any questions while visiting the site, you can send the foundation an email at **office@ahvmf.org**.



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