Acral Lick Granulomas in the Dog

Acral lick granulomas are a problem that can be seen frequently in dogs. This is a condition in which your dog causes a firm, raised ulcerative lesion usually on the carpus (wrist) or tarsus (ankle) by licking and chewing the skin excessively. It can be seen in any age or breed of dog but it is most commonly associated with large breed dogs. If the age of onset is greater than 5 years old, then allergies are strong considerations as the inciting cause. Other associated conditions include bacterial infections of the skin, endocrine disorders, fungal disease, mite infestation, trauma to the area, foreign body reactions, and compulsive/psychogenic disorders. All of these conditions can play a role as the inciting factor.

Several diagnostic steps will need to be done by your veterinarian in order to determine the cause of the lick granuloma. A skin scraping and dermatophyte (fungal) culture should be done in order to rule out demodicosis (mites) and dermatophytosis (fungus). A cytology of the area can be done by rubbing a swab over the lesion and performing a microscopic examination of the prepared slide. This will allow your veterinarian or veterinary technician to determine if bacteria or yeast is present. If bacteria are found then a culture to determine the specific agent may be warranted. As mentioned earlier, allergies can play a role as an inciting cause of lick granulomas. A food trial can be done in order to determine if food allergies are responsible for the lesion. This includes strictly feeding your pet a hypoallergenic diet prescribed by your veterinarian for 2 months. Environmental factors can also be responsible for allergies in dogs. An intradermal skin test can be done by your veterinarian to test your pet against specific allergens. Some pets that have sustained previous trauma to their tarsus or carpus will chew or lick at the area. This may be due to some nerve dysfunction in that region. Radiographs of the carpus or tarsus may be indicated to look for evidence of previous injury. Another important cause of lick granulomas includes psychogenic or compulsive disorders. Animals that are prone to separation anxiety will often cause self-trauma.

Treatment of lick granulomas can be time-consuming and recurrence is common. Finding the underlying cause of the lick granuloma will give the best success with treatment. Most lick granulomas will have a primary or secondary bacterial component
due to the ulcerated appearance of the lesion. Usually systemic and topical antibiotics are prescribed. A minimum of six weeks of treatment is usually necessary. Antihistamines such as hydroxyzine, chlorpheniramine, and doxepin can be used if an allergy component is suspected. Do not use more than one antihistamine at a time. Topical corticosteroids can be used to help decrease the inflammation of the lesion. Laser procedures can be performed to remove lick granulomas in patients where medical therapy is unsuccessful. This procedure will require your pet to undergo general anesthesia so pre-anesthetic blood work is recommended. If a compulsive or psychogenic reason is suspected as the cause of the lick granuloma then anti-anxiety drugs such as clomicalm (clomipramine) can be prescribed as well as implementation of behavioral modification. If you think that your pet may have a lick granulomas please contact your veterinarian or veterinary technician for more information.

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References:
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