

Give Your Dog's Calluses Soft Treatment

An expert answers questions on dog care.

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Q. I have a 2-year-old Dalmatian. She has bald, red spots on both of her elbows. These spots grew during a six-month period and seem sensitive or sore when touched. Each spot is oval-shaped and about 2 inches long. Aloe vera and other lotions have not helped.

A. These sound like probable elbow calluses, which are common in large- and giant-breed dogs.

Calluses are bald, thickened, oval or circular, and often rough, dry and crusty over the points of bones, most commonly the elbows and hocks. True calluses develop from chronic irritation where the elbow or hock touches the ground when the dog sits or lies down, usually the outsides and back of the joints. Their color may be red to dark gray or black.

The sites are not usually painful, though some are sensitive. The calluses usually develop over months or years and are especially common in dogs that lie frequently on hard, unyielding surfaces such as concrete. Secondary problems are rare.

Overly thickened, dry and crusted calluses can ulcerate and crack, leading to bleeding and discomfort. These sites are also prone to bacterial infections. Application of aloe vera, petroleum jelly or other softening agents helps to maintain pliability and moisture, reducing secondary problems.

Soft bedding to help cushion the joints is especially helpful, although many dogs prefer hard surfaces. Any obvious swelling, irritation, drainage or sudden changes in appearance of the calluses should be brought to the attention of your veterinarian.