

## Dog Self-Mutilation Caused by Allergies?

### What to do when your dog chews his pawpads.

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Q. I have a 2-year-old, American Staff/Lab mix that sometimes bites the top skin off the bottom of her paw pads, which creates an open wound. I try to run with her about a few times a week for about 3-miles. She runs on grass 75 percent of the time, and concrete 25 percent. Could this be affecting her pads or do you believe she has some sort of allergy. She eats a premium diet, and I have tried to switch out her snacks to see if it might be a food allergy. Can you help me?

A. It is a bit of a mystery explaining why your dog is chewing the skin off of her footpads, but I will give you a list of possibilities.

As I have said before, being a veterinarian is a lot like being a homicide detective: you have to figure out what happened, but your patient can't talk.

1) This could be behavioral. For example, your dog might be bored and just decide to chew on her footpads. This is something many dogs do, just to frustrate their owners.

Possible solution: Divert her with chew toys when she starts to do it. Downside: She will soon expect a treat of some kind as a reward for this behavior.

2) This could be a form of contact dermatitis, where something very irritating is on the footpads. Do you let her run through fields of weeds or on concrete where possibly toxic chemicals have been spilled, such as paint or turpentine?

3) Her feet may be sore from running on concrete or hard surfaces.

4) She may have allergies, either to her food or something in the air, which could make her feet itchy. This is tougher to diagnose, and will probably require extensive allergy testing.

In the meantime, I would consider purchasing some of those great booties they make for dogs, to protect their feet. This will allow her feet to heal up, and also protect them from further irritation or damage, as well as keeping her from chewing at them.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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