

Stick to Meds for Dog Licking Paws

Dog licking paws to soothe irritation can turn into obsessive behavior for some dogs.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I noticed my 5-year-old Weimaraner licking his front paw where the nail meets the skin. He eventually stopped, but that night he licked all of his paws non-stop by the looks of them. They look like they have been burnt with his back paws worse than his front. He's been treated, but now must wear an E-collar which he hates. Now he's limping on the paw that's in the worse condition. He's never had skin problems or allergies, though he may have come into contact with harmful chemicals while on our walks. The webs of his paws are varying shades of red, and he has some lesions which are turning black.

A. It sounds like your Weimaraner has developed some dermatitis on his toes. Dermatitis indicates redness and inflammation, and could be caused by infection, inflammation from allergies, contact with a toxin, or self-trauma due to a behavioral problem.

Weimaraners are well-known for their predilection for compulsive behavior. Although your dog has not shown any evidence of obsessive-compulsive type of behavior up to this point, it is not unusual that something might set him off. Any kind of irritant or allergic reaction may have set off the initial licking behavior, and then a cycle of irritation and licking begins. The more he licks, the more irritated the skin becomes, so the more he licks.

I would recommend continuing on the medication that your veterinarian has recommended, and consider switching from the plastic cone to a newer generation of soft collars. These newer collars are flexible and will not bother you or your dog nearly as much as the shin-banging, table-clearing plastic Elizabethan collar. If you are worried that he is in pain, ask your veterinarian about Tramadol, a mild opioid-based pain killer.

It is important to use the collar for as long as necessary – possibly several months – to help break the cycle of licking and itching. If your dog has truly developed an obsessive-compulsive type of behavior, anti-psychotic drugs such as Prozac or Xanax may be helpful (for your dog, not you).