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Psychogenic Dermatitis in Cats (Neurodermatitis, Hyperesthesia)

General Information

Psychogenic dermatitis is a disease of cats that involves intense licking of a local skin area. The cat's barbed, rough tongue causes severe irritation to the skin. This exposes sensitive nerve endings, stimulating the cat to lick even more, leading to further damage. The cause may be skin irritation or infection, ear or anal sac infections or simply a nervous habit. Eventual hair loss and extensive skin damage result.

Psychogenic dermatitis is frequently caused by anxiety precipitated by a change in environment, such as a new pet or baby, new surroundings, boarding, loss of a companion pet or family member, or feeling threatened by a neighboring cat or insensitive family members. Siamese and Abyssinian cats are most likely to be affected.

Important Points in Treatment

1. If the cat's licking can be stopped, the sores heal quickly. In many cases, however, breaking the itch-lick cycle is very difficult and requires much patience on your part.
2. Direct application of medication to the sores rarely helps because the cat usually licks it off immediately.
3. Treatment consists of oral or injectable medications designed to stop the cat's licking. In some cases, barriers to licking such as bandages or obstructing collars are beneficial. Sedation may also help.
4. A thorough analysis of any recent environmental changes may reveal the underlying cause, which may then be corrected.

Notify the Doctor if Any of the Following Occur

- Your cat continues to lick the skin.
- Your cat develops new sores or the condition spreads.
- Your cat's signs return after apparent recovery.