

## Self-Mutilation and Excessive Grooming

**Allergies are the most likely cause for extreme grooming behaviors.**

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Q. My 11-year-old male (neutered) American Shorthair constantly chews on his belly, lower nipple area, and back hindquarters. He also chewed a big raw spot near his back hip area. He has no fever, a good appetite and is active. Also, there are no signs of fleas or flea dirt. My other two cats don't have any of these symptoms, which makes me believe that this is an isolated problem.

He does go outdoors occasionally, only for about 20 minutes--and not every day. The vet prescribed Clamavox, but it did not help.

I've been working a lot lately, and not home much so I'm thinking it is stress-related since I'm away from home so much. Is it safe if I put an antibiotic ointment on the raw spot or do you think it will poison him if ingested?

Q. My healthy cat licks the hair off the back of her leg in one small spot. It doesn't seem to be irritated, no redness or pain. Why has she picked this specific spot?

A. Cats do not generally chew or lick to the point where they create lesions as described. I don't believe your cats are simply having behavioral problems either. My guess is that your cats are suffering from an allergic disorder, either to fleas, food or some inhaled allergen.

Even if your cats go outside infrequently, one fleabite can trigger a flea allergy dermatitis such as this. It is important to provide stringent flea control. In addition, your veterinarian may want to perform a skin scraping to rule out external mites or set a dermatophyte test media to rule out fungal disease. It may be necessary to obtain a biopsy of the affected area to determine a definitive diagnosis. Once the diagnosis is made, treatment can be instituted to treat the underlying cause of their problem.