

## Excessive Grooming

**Find out what a vet recommends for excessive grooming.**

*Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, DVM*

Q. How can I tell if my cat grooms excessively, and what can I do to prevent this?

Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, DVM says: You can tell that your cat grooms excessively if she makes herself bald or red in certain areas of her skin or creates open sores. Cats normally groom about one-third of the time that they are not sleeping, but this does not usually cause any irritation or noticeable hair loss.

Veterinarians call excessive grooming psychogenic alopecia if it is a behavioral reaction to stress. The condition is similar to that of humans who bite their fingernails too low-its an unconscious habit. Your veterinarian should eliminate medical causes for excessive grooming such as fleas, allergies, or bacterial or fungal infections before he or she can diagnose psychogenic alopecia.

Cats who overgroom tend to vomit more hairballs than average cats due to the ingestion of extra hair. Some cats overgroom because they are bored or want to attract their owners attention. If your cat grooms excessively but doesn't create bald patches or more extensive lesions, try to interrupt the behavior and engage her in another activity such as petting or play. If bald areas or sores exist, the temporary use of an Elizabethan collar, a lampshade-like protective collar that prevents the cat from grooming or chewing on herself, can help to break the behavior problem and gives the skin time to heal. Bad-tasting topical sprays are also useful for discouraging the constant licking.

Antihistamines, herbal calming remedies, and antianxiety medications can all be used to break the cycle and calm your cat. See your veterinarian for a recommendation specific to your cat.

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