

Casey's Abnormal Belly Grooming

A cat's continual grooming of his belly and nipple area may indicate an allergy or skin condition.

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Q. I have a 2-year-old orange tabby named Casey. I rescued him from the local no-kill shelter. He is very friendly and playful and likes to groom himself a lot. I've noticed that when he washes his belly he seems to think his nipples don't belong there, and he tries to wash them away or bite at them. He has never bitten them so hard that they bled, but they do become a bit red and swollen.

I have also wondered if he was taken away from his mother too soon and is trying to nurse off himself. Aside from this behavior he seems very happy and well-adjusted. The shelter didn't have any history on him, other than he was a stray. Should I be concerned? Is there anything I should be doing?

A. This is rather unusual behavior and it may either be truly a behavioral oddity or it could be a symptom of an underlying disease process. Many cats manifest allergic skin disease by over grooming, and I would certainly think that this could be the case with your kitty.

A recent study published by a group of behaviorists found that over 60 percent of the cats that displayed signs of abnormal grooming behavior were found to have underlying physical (not mental) problems. I recommend that you take your kitty to the veterinarian for a full diagnostic work-up, which may include a biopsy of the skin in this area to determine if allergies are playing a roll in your cats behavior.