



## **SKIN CONDITIONS IN GUINEA PIGS**

Guinea pigs can be sensitive creatures and irritated skin can be very upsetting for them. They often bite and scratch themselves constantly which can cause severe wounds. Some guinea pigs can also have 'seizures' due to skin problems in severe cases.

### **So what causes skin problems commonly in guinea pigs?**

- Parasite Infection. This is the most common skin complaint that we see. Infections can be due to mites, fur mite or lice.
- Common cat and dog fleas may be seen on guinea pigs that share households with these species.
- Fungal infections (ringworm). This is often seen in large colonies. Areas of hair loss are often limited to the nose and show yellow crusts with the classic ringworm circle.
- Bacterial skin infection can also be seen usually in poor environmental conditions, or as a secondary condition with parasite infections.
- Even moderate Vitamin C deficiencies can cause rough coats and hair loss, this can also be seen in conjunction with parasite infection. Unwell guinea pigs also have a higher requirement for this vitamin and should be supplement.
- The scent gland at the base of tail, especially in boys, may get matted and secondarily infected. This often needs to be maintained with regular bathing and brushing.
- Two unusual causes of hair loss in guinea pigs are stress and barbering (chewing themselves or other more dominant guinea pigs chewing their coats).
- Hormonal causes. Pregnant guinea pigs can lose hair at the back of their legs and on their back area in the lead up to giving birth. Cystic ovaries are commonly seen in unsterilised female guinea pigs, can also cause hair loss, usually in round patches on both sides of their back.

### **How do we find out what is causing the skin lesions?**

Parasite infections can be difficult to find on a guinea pig with the naked eye and often 'skin scrapings' and 'tape preparations' are needed. Skin scrapings can be uncomfortable, especially on the irritated skin of some guinea pigs, and in some cases a sedation is required. Even with this it can be difficult to see the parasites and we often 'trial' treatment generally with good results.

Other conditions such as fleas and hormonal conditions often have characteristics signs that allow us to differentiate them from parasite infections.





### Could it be something else?

Skin conditions may also be the first sign of an underlying serious illness. If you are concerned further tests such as blood tests or imaging (x-rays, ultrasound, CT) may be warranted.

If you have any concerns about your guinea pig please don't hesitate to contact us.

