

Hair loss (alopecia) in cats

Overview

Alopecia is a term used to describe hair loss, either complete bald spots, patchy fur or thinning of the fur. Alopecia develops in one of two ways, either your cat pulls their fur out or it falls out. Common causes include fleas, stress and allergies.

Your cat's fur provides them with protection and warmth so alopecia and other skin diseases can make them feel very unwell. Always book an appointment with your vet if you notice your cat losing fur.

What is alopecia?

Alopecia is a term used to describe hair loss, either complete bald patches, patchy fur or thinning of the fur.

Depending on what is causing your cat's alopecia, you may notice other symptoms, such as:

- Red skin
- Bumps or scabs on the skin
- Scaly, dry skin
- Itchiness
- Over grooming (licking and chewing more than usual)
- Losing whiskers
- Patches of dark skin
- Lethargy (sleeping more than usual)
- Drinking more than usual
- Eating more or less than usual

Causes of alopecia

There are two main ways alopecia can develop, either your cat's fur falls out - due to illness, injury or disease, or your cat over-grooms and pulls their fur out - usually due to itchy skin, pain or stress.

Common causes of alopecia in cats are listed below:

Fleas

- Fleas cause cats to bite and scratch themselves a lot and often develop bald patches around their lower back, inside of the hind legs and around the neck and ears.
- Symptoms tend to be much worse if they are allergic to fleas.

Allergies

- Allergic skin disease (atopy) causes very itchy skin. Alopecia develops because cats with atopy tend to excessively scratch, bite and groom themselves.

Ringworm

- Ringworm is a very contagious fungus (not a worm!), it lives on the skin and hairs. It causes fur to fall out by damaging hair follicles. Ringworm causes circular patches of flaky, red, itchy skin.

Bacterial skin infections

- Bacterial skin infections cause itchy skin and bald patches. This is due to hair follicle damage and also excessive licking and scratching.

Feline eosinophilic granuloma complex

- Feline eosinophilic granuloma complex is a condition affecting the immune system – it causes bald, red, angry skin.

Inherited

- Alopecia can be an inherited condition, meaning it's passed down from a cat's mother or father.
- The Sphynx cat has been bred to have no fur. Having no fur can cause problems such as injuries and sunburn.

Alopecia around wounds

- Cuts, grazes, abscesses and burns can cause areas of permanent fur loss if the damage is deep and has scarred the skin.

Over-grooming

- It's normal for a cat to spend a lot of time grooming. It becomes abnormal if they start to develop bald patches, areas with very little fur or they damage their own skin.
- Over grooming tends to be due to stress, pain or itchy skin.

Hormone disease

- Hormones disease such as hyperthyroidism can cause hair to fall out without causing itchiness.

When to contact your vet

If you notice any bald patches on your cat it is a good idea to book an appointment with your vet. Some of the diseases that cause hair loss are serious, and skin disease can make your cat really miserable.

You know your cat best. If you are concerned, always book an appointment with your vet.

Treatment for alopecia

Treatment depends entirely on what is causing your cat's hair loss. Once your vet has examined them they will be able to advise you which treatments will help.

Preventing fleas is very important, you should regularly de-flea your cat with a product prescribed by your vet. Being flea-free will ensure your cat's skin stays as healthy as possible.

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