

## Rat Scratches Self And Has Tiny Scabs On Body

**An owner asks what could cause a pet rat to scratch and develop scabs.**

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Posted: September 13, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

**Q:** One of my rats has many tiny scabs on his upper body, and he is always scratching himself. What can I do to help him? He is by himself in his own cage away from all my other ratties. I read that olive oil will help. What do you think?

**A:** While there are many possible causes for scabbing on a rat, only two of these causes are common. And fortunately for your little guy, neither of these conditions requires that he live alone during his treatment.

The first possibility is mites or lice. Don't panic, they are species-specific (meaning they only like rats). Effective treatment to rid your pet rat of these pests is best done by a veterinarian, but you can provide him some relief while you find the source of the problem. The second possible cause (and by far the most common) is a diet that is too high in fat and/or protein.

Start by keeping his cage extra clean. Use a soft and low-allergy bedding, paper or aspen based are two good choices, and change it every few days. Give your rat a bath once a week with a gentle shampoo that is safe for kittens, this will reduce the number of mites and lice, if they're present, and will provide him some relief. Next, eliminate all grain mix and treats from your rats' diet (everyone, not just his). Rats should receive a good quality lab block as the base of their diet with plenty of fresh vegetables and small amounts of fruit and whole grain breads and cereals as treats. This diet will also help keep your rat leaner and healthier.

After two weeks you should notice a serious reduction in scratching and scabs. But if the problem continues to get worse, take your rat to a veterinarian to determine the cause and receive appropriate treatment.