

Rat Won't Leave Incision Site Alone

A female rat repeatedly re-opens a wound, despite her owner's efforts to prevent this.

By Carol Lawton

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Q: I'm at my wit's end with my rat Isabel. She had stitches put in two weeks ago after a surgery to remove a benign tumor. She pulled them out, so the veterinarian put in staples. She eventually pulled those out, too. After two weeks and more staples, she healed and the vet gave her a clean bill of health.

Two days ago, though, she somehow used her teeth and reopened her closed-up wound. I don't know how she did it. She went back to the vet yesterday, and he closed up the wound again. My rat has now taken them out again, and the wound is now open and infected. We've tried everything from making sweaters to put over her, meds, the bitter spray stuff and nothing seems to be working. I don't know how she can let it heal if she continues to open it up. Any advice would be greatly appreciated!

A: While most female rats are fairly good patients, stories like yours are not uncommon. One of the things that makes female rats such a delightful pet is their busy nature. Unfortunately, this can also makes them a vet's worst nightmare. Female rats that are inclined to play with their surgical site will pluck out sutures and staples with the same joyful energetic attitude that they use when stashing treats or running on their wheel. For rats like that, the healing process can be long and challenging.

It sounds like you've tried all of the recommended techniques to protect the wound, so you may need to try rotating multiple techniques. If you keep your rat busy trying to get rid of the sweaters, wrappings and cone-collars, perhaps it will give her less time to damage the surgical area.

This is not a time to feel sorry for her, it's time to get tough with your efforts to keep your rat away from the wound. If you have your rat sutured again, consider metal sutures. Metal sutures poke the rat in the nose if a rat tries to chew them, so most rats leave them alone.

Ask your vet about keeping your rat on antibiotics until she's completely healed, it will not only clear up the current infection, it may prevent further infection of the site if she continues to damage the site.

You may have a long battle on your hands with your rat, but, if you stick with it, the site should eventually heal.

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