

## Is Rat Suffering From Infection Or Ringworm?

**A rat chewed its skin and now has a skin infection, or could it really be ringworm?**

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**Q:** I have a pet rat that has recently started chewing at himself, which left some rawness on his belly. That has now turned into an infection, and it looks really infected. I put some salve on it, but someone told me it looks like ringworm. Do you know what I can do for him?

**A:** It is always difficult to know the best way to treat an irritation of the skin, because many different causes look the same. When the skin layer becomes disrupted, the skin's reaction is the same no matter what the cause. The skin will look red, there may be some oozing and there may even be a scab.

If your rat continues to chew at the area, then this prevents the body from trying to heal the irritation. Each time the skin puts on a fragile layer of new cells, your rat chews it off. This allows opportunistic organisms to "set up shop" and cause infection on the skin.

Infections, secondary to chewing, are almost always due to bacteria but even fungal organisms can invade this area.

One of two reasons could be preventing the irritated skin area from getting better with the salve you are using. First, you may need a stronger antibiotic that is only available through your veterinarian. Second, it may not be a bacterial infection and, therefore, you need a different medication.

Ringworm usually appears without any inciting cause, such as chewing of the hair. The fact that you saw chewing first and then a skin irritation next usually means this is a secondary bacterial or fungal infection and not ringworm.

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