

Itchy Hamster

An owner wants to know what is causing a pet hamster to itch.

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Posted: May 2, 2008, 6 a.m. EDT

Q: Our hamster has been very itchy lately. She rubs up against her cage and scratches a lot when she wakes up about 8 p.m. What's this about?

A: Skin diseases in hamsters are very common. Fortunately, they can be easily diagnosed by your veterinarian. Common causes include ectoparasites (mites or lice), fungal infections (dermatophytes) and even skin cancer. In an unusual case, you might have a hamster that is sensitive to something in the cage, including a cleaning product.

Visit your veterinarian. He or she will do some tests to find out the cause of the itching. Some of these tests include removing some hair and top layers of skin to look at under the microscope for skin parasites. Another test would include removing hairs and placing those hairs on a culture plate to look for a topical fungal infection. For skin cancer, a biopsy sample would need to be taken and then sent to a pathologist (a veterinarian who specializes in reading slides to make a diagnosis). Once a diagnosis is made, treatment can be started. But the first step is to find a veterinarian familiar with hamster diseases who can help out your little guy.