

Hair Loss in Cats

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Does your cat seem to be going bald? What does that mean? Is he sick? Why is it happening? And what, if anything, can you do about it? There are, in fact, lots of reasons why a cat can be bald or suffer from [hair loss](#) or alopecia.

Sometimes cats are born bald.

Some cats, like the [Sphynx](#), are born with hardly any hair. In these cats, the lack of hair is a genetically-determined and desirable characteristic among proponents of the breed. Some folks seek out this particular look in a cat just like others might prefer a long-haired cat over a short-haired.

Sometimes feline hair loss is benign and temporary.

There are also transient reasons for hair loss. Just like people go through stages where they lose more hair, cats do too. [Shedding](#) is a natural and normal process that can vary in degrees. Cats that are sick or [stressed](#) for other reasons (illness, [fevers](#), [respiratory infections](#)¹, [pregnancy](#), etc.) can shed excessively. These are not conditions that demand treatment since the cat's coat should return to normal over time.

Sometimes the hair loss is medically important.

It is important, however, to consult your veterinarian if you are noticing any changes in your cat's coat or if he is developing bald areas. Sometimes hair loss **is** due to a medical problem that does require intervention since the underlying reason for it can cause more serious and systemic problems relating to your cat's overall health.

Your [veterinarian](#) will want to determine if your cat's hair is falling out on its own or if he is [scratching](#), licking or [chewing](#) the hair off as a result of some [inflammation](#) or irritation. This distinction can help to focus the diagnostic approach in your cat's case. Generally, if your cat is actively causing the hair loss, you and your

veterinarian will be looking more for causes of [dermatitis](#) or inflammation of the skin (like [allergies](#)) or for infectious diseases like bacterial, [fungal](#) or [parasitic](#) diseases (like acne/pyoderma, [ringworm](#) or mange [mites](#)). In these cases, the answer may be found through skin scrapings, cytology, cultures or allergy testing; and appropriate therapy can result in hair re-growth.

In dogs, [hormonal](#) imbalance (underactive thyroid, adrenal dysfunctions, etc.) is a common cause of poor coats and hair loss, but these conditions are not as common in cats. Overactive thyroid ([hyperthyroidism](#)), however, does occur frequently in older cats and can cause coat changes² as can almost any other systemic or metabolic disease; your veterinarian may want to do diagnostic tests to know for sure. [Click here to learn how your veterinarian will test for hyperthyroidism.](#)

Sometimes the hair loss is psychological.

That is not to say that it's "all in his head" and that your cat isn't really going bald. Rather it means that many cats become obsessive about [grooming](#). Obviously grooming is a major focus of your cat's average day, but cats exhibiting psychogenic alopecia can break off their hair right down at the skin and over large areas of their bodies – sometimes any and every place they can effectively reach leaving hair only on their head and neck.

The compulsion may start because of some irritation to the skin (as above), and then potentially continue on habitually, even after the inciting problem has resolved. Other cats will groom excessively for solely emotional reasons – a change in environment, a new family member, or some other stress. Whatever the reason, this form of alopecia indicates that your cat is either physically or emotionally uncomfortable or unhappy, and every effort should be made to determine what the problem is and to correct it either with medical or behavioral therapy.

In summary, hair loss or alopecia in cats can be just a cosmetic issue or it can be due to a primary skin problem. It can also be an external indication of a more serious systemic or psychological disorder. Consult your veterinarian as soon as you see any changes in your cat's coat so the two of you can address the problem as

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soon as possible.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.

Resources:

[1. "Alopecia." THE MERCK VETERINARY MANUAL. MERCK MANUALS. 10 Nov. 2014.](#)

[2. Kennis, Robert A. "Feline Dermatology." Texas A&M University. June 2006. Lecture.](#)



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