



## Interesting Case from our web site [www.fairfield-vets.co.uk](http://www.fairfield-vets.co.uk)



### "Betty" - Hamster with hair loss.



This week I examined a Syrian hamster named Betty. Her hair coat looked ruffled and she had lost hair. She had a little patch of dry scaly skin on her back.

There are several diseases that can cause hair loss or baldness.

Dermatophytosis or fungal disease is rare in hamsters. This disease can be asymptomatic or dry circular bald lesion can develop. The only way to diagnose this disease is to send a hair sample to the laboratory for a fungal culture.

Systemic diseases in older hamsters, such as amyloidosis and hyperadrenocorticism (an hormonal disease) cause baldness as well.

The two conditions I see the most are skin cancer and an infection with demodectic mites.

Skin cancer or epitheliotropic lymphoma is the second most common skin cancer in hamsters. The most common type of skin cancer are melanomas. These are lumps, which are easily recognisable by their black colour. However, they should not be confused with the little dark brown to black spots on the flanks of the hamster.

Hamsters have large glands on either flank. These are more prominent in male animals. These flank or hip glands are used for marking territory. In adult males, the haircoat over the glands can become matted, and the glands may be readily visible. Some hamsters will scratch the glands.

A hamster with epitheliotropic lymphoma will gradually get bald. First the skin will become thicker and flaky, like the skin of an elephant. Later lumps, crusts and ulcers can develop. The hamster is often extremely itchy. To diagnose this disease the hamster will need an anaesthetic to take a skin biopsy, which then will be analysed by a pathologist in a laboratory.

The most common disease however is demodicosis. This disease can be caused by two mites. *Demodex criceti* is a short mite and lives in the superficial layers of the skin. *Demodex aurati* is a long mite and lives in the hair follicles. The mite can be found in low numbers in every hamster skin. Mites are transmitted from mother to young during suckling.

When hamsters get older, or when there is a concurrent immunosuppressive disease these mites can multiply excessively and cause skin disease. The diagnosis can be made by taking a skin scrape. Because of their wriggly nature most hamsters will need to have an anaesthetic to do this. However, Betty was very well behaved, and let me scrape off a small area of skin. When I looked at this sample under the microscope I could see several *Demodex aurati* mites. Betty will now be treated to kill those mites, and hopefully grow her hair back.

Ingrid Segboer

---

This article is available on the Fairfield Veterinary Centre web site at [www.fairfield-vets.co.uk](http://www.fairfield-vets.co.uk)

***You won't care how much we know - until you know how much we care***