

Porcupines and skunks are primarily nocturnal animals that unleash nasty surprises on unsuspecting dogs and their humans. Skunk spray is mostly annoying, although may have health effects at close range. Porcupines, on the other hand, have a much more serious weapon: quills.

Porcupine quills are commonly found embedded in muzzle, face, head and neck of dogs, but can be found anywhere. The trouble is, quills keep moving inward. Learn more about porcupines, quills and dogs and what you need to do if your dog is "quilled" by a porcupine.



## 1. Porcupines

Porcupines are most active at night, but may be found foraging for food during the day, too. They have poor eyesight, but a great sense of smell.

They are herbivores - eating plants, twigs, leaves and bark. Fond of salt, they may gnaw on bones or approach areas inhabited by humans for this mineral.

There are 29 species of porcupines around the world, and they are one of the largest members of the rodent (*rodentia*) family. Their habitat ranges from grasslands, to forests, to deserts.

Quills are off-white and black and are made out of keratin. Up to 30,000 quills cover the average porcupine.



## 2. Quills

Quills have very tiny one-way barbs along the shaft of the quill. This makes it easy for quills to keep moving... inward!

Quills may puncture through skin and muscle to enter body cavities, puncturing organs.

Quills inside the body also cause infection and abscesses.

Your veterinarian is best-equipped to remove quills. Quill removal is painful and quills may break off inside your pet. Removing quills under anesthesia reduces traumatic removal/quill breakage and allows for more thorough checking. (All muscles and skin are relaxed, making it easier to palpate for quills).

## 3. Myths About Porcupines and Quills

Throwing quills - Contrary to popular belief, the porcupine cannot "throw" the quills, but they are easily "let go of" by the porcupine and embedded in animals who tangle with it.

Quills working their way out - Quills may get infected and work themselves out, but most often, they continue to work *inward*. I once treated a dog who the people tried to treat at home. They removed what quills they could, then figured the rest would work their way out. A few weeks later, we saw the dog - covered in abscesses all over the body from the remaining quill tips.

Breaking quills - Some people advocate crushing the quill to "let the air out" of it, but quills are like the shaft of a feather. This doesn't work; they just get more splinter-y.

## 4. If Your Dog Gets Quilled

Minimize movement - quills embedded in the chest and legs may migrate in further.

**Call your veterinarian** - most often quills are removed in-office under anesthesia and the dog is home the same day. For severe cases, x-rays, ultrasound and surgery may be required to find internally embedded quills.

Pulling quills out is risky - quills break off easily, and "tenting" of the skin while pulling out quills may bury nearby quills, making them almost impossible to remove. <C:\u\sty\doghealthfaq\Tell-Us-About-Your-Dogs-Experience-With-Porcupine-Quills>



