

INFORMATION & ARTICLES

GROOMING & CARE

excerpts from the Puppy Pak



compiled by
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BATHING YOUR PET

1. A pet's skin is very different from human skin. It is thinner, has no sweat glands, and has a different acidity. Human shampoos including baby shampoo are too harsh for pets' skin. The delicacy of your pet's skin increases if they have skin disease. Do not use normal dog shampoos if your pet is itchy or you suspect skin disease.
2. Bathe the pet whenever it is dirty or smells bad using recommended products
3. Brush and comb your pet **before** the bath making sure to remove any matted fur. Many owners have accidentally cut their dogs trying to clip away matted fur. Use dematting combs or electric clippers to trim away mats instead. If you have any concerns you cannot clip the hair away safely, get veterinary help.
4. Pack cotton into your pet's ears to keep them dry. Remember to take them out when you are done.
5. Avoid washing the head and face.
6. Wet thoroughly before applying soap. Use lukewarm water for pet's comfort. Use cool water if your pet is itchy.
7. Thoroughly lather the shampoo over your pet's whole body using your fingers. Use water, instead of extra soap, to increase the lather.
8. Allow the lather to sit on the pet's body for 1-2 minutes.
9. Rinse thoroughly, making sure all soap residue is gone, to prevent skin irritation.
10. Repeat shampoo if your pet is very dirty and rinse again.
11. Squeeze hair to remove any excess water and dry thoroughly with a towel. Don't allow wet pets to get too cold.

NAIL TRIMMING

Some dogs resent having their paws held or their nails trimmed. This intolerance is partly instinctive in young animals, and may also be learned from an unpleasant experience during nail trimming.

The living portion of the nail bed contains sensitive nerves and blood vessels. If toe nails are cut too short, a dog learns that nail trimming is painful. This negative experience is not easily forgotten. Once a pet has learned to anticipate discomfort when its feet are touched, its evasive reaction can intensify each time. It may become so difficult to trim a panicky pet's nails that sedation or even general anesthesia is necessary to accomplish the task.

If your pet is instinctively cautious about having its feet touched, and even if it shows no signs of withdrawing its paw, teach your pet that this interaction is not unpleasant. Before you ever attempt to trim your pet's nails, begin by touching its legs, feet and toes, and associate this with an activity it enjoys. When it is resting, begin petting it, gently passing your hands over its back and legs. If this is well tolerated, you may wish to give it a small food treat. Do not try to do too much the first time.

Gradually manipulate your pet's foot more each time. Eventually, you should be able to slip your fingers in between each toe, gently squeezing each one to flex the nail, applying gentle pressure as you hold each foot and manipulate the leg. Do not attempt this exercise when your pet is agitated or playful, as it is most likely to resent any restriction to its movement. Once your pet tolerates having its feet touched during quiet times, you may begin to incorporate this into elements of playtime. Train your dog to assume a "down/stay" position when it retrieves a ball, for example and "shake" its paw before continuing the game.

If you are unsure of how to trim your pet's toe nails, ask your veterinarian or a technician to show you how. They can show you where the sensitive nerves and blood vessels are likely to be found. The nail bed is seen as a pinkish triangle at the base of the nail; however, it may not be evident in dark colored nails.

There is more variety between the shapes of toe nails in dogs than in cats. Some pets' nails grow in a more curved shape, as compared with those growing more parallel to the ground. This may determine how short they may be trimmed. Even a skilled professional can misjudge the depth to which a nail may be trimmed. It is also not uncommon for a pet to withdraw a foot while the nail is being clipped, because of pressure on sensitive nail areas.

IT IS BETTER TO CUT LESS THAN TO CUT MORE THAN NECESSARY!

Trim off small sections at a time and stop well short of the sensitive part of the nail. Cutting the nail too short results in a painful experience for your pet. Cut your pet's nails frequently, a little at a time, rather than waiting until toe nails are uncomfortable to both your pet and to you. In this way, nail trimming will become a routine event, rather than a periodic wrestling match. Continue to manipulate your pet's feet and toes between nail trims so that it remains a familiar sensation.

If your dog has already had an unpleasant experience with nail trimming, you can train it to tolerate it by starting from the beginning. Even if you have followed the preliminary training steps above, start over as if its feet had never been conditioned to manipulation and gradually desensitize your pet to this interaction once again. Your veterinarian may recommend a small dose of a mild anti-anxiety medication to facilitate retraining in extreme cases.

If your pet overreacts to nail trimming at the veterinarian's office during its annual exam and vaccination, you may wish to schedule a separate appointment for nail trimming. In some cases, a dog reaction to nail trimming is so extreme that retraining is difficult and may not be worthwhile. For these unhappy pets, nail trimming is best avoided.

DENTAL CARE

Preventive dental care is important for keeping our pets pain-free, preventing tooth extractions, and minimizing dental cleanings under anesthesia. Since dental cleanings can run between \$300-\$1000, preventing even 2 dental cleanings in your pets' lifetime will save your pet pain and you money.

Many pets will learn to enjoy (or at least tolerate) daily teeth brushing. Since tartar starts building up on teeth within 3 days of brushing, we have to brush our pet's teeth at least 3 times a week to make a difference. Getting into a routine of brushing **daily** leaves us some room for error. Here is how we generally recommend introducing your pet to teeth brushing:

- 1) Let your pet lick the toothpaste off your finger once a day for a week
- 2) Let your pet lick the toothpaste off the toothbrush once a day for a week
- 3) Try brushing one tooth per day once daily for a week
- 4) Try brushing the whole mouth once daily. Pet may chew at the toothbrush, which is normal. You only need to brush the outside of the teeth and do not need to rinse the mouth afterward.

Many pet store toothpastes do not have the important enzymes that make pet toothpaste effective. We recommend "CET" brand toothpaste because it has multiple enzymes to prevent bacterial growth. Original Petrodex, available at most pet stores only has one of these enzymes. "Natural" Petrodex, "Arm and Hammer", and other toothpastes are not advertised as enzyme-based formulas.

If your pet will not tolerate having his or her teeth brushed, there are other alternatives, like a pet-safe mouthwash. The mouthwash squeeze bottle has a spout on it that helps you spray the mouthwash on your pet's teeth.

The most convenient option for pet owners is often feeding a dental food like Purina DH or Hill's t/d. Unlike most dry kibbles that shatter when chewed, this food allows your pet's teeth to sink all the way in, brushing the surface of the tooth as they bite.

While not as effective as either of these options, dental chew toys may provide a small benefit.

When buying dental toys and bones, make sure to choose items that have the VOHC (Veterinary Oral Health Council) seal of approval. Any product can say it is good for teeth, but items with the VOHC seal have had to prove they help fight plaque. We carry several of these items.

There are some gel and spray products that are marketed to get rid of tartar "magically". Many of these products work by having a high alcohol content that helps eventually dissolve visible tartar from the surface of the teeth. Unfortunately these products do nothing to get rid of bacteria and infection below the gums. Some of these pets will have beautiful looking teeth while bad infection lurks below the surface. These products also often hurt your pet since the alcohol stings your pet's sensitive gums.

Once tartar builds up on the teeth, the only way to safely and completely remove it is with a dental cleaning under anesthesia. Performing this procedure earlier rather than later helps us make your pet more comfortable, prevents the dental disease from getting worse, and hopefully prevents the need to extract teeth. These procedures vary in cost depending on the need for extractions.

Some puppies, especially small, toy breeds of dog, will not lose all their baby teeth. If they have not lost these teeth by 6 months of age, they are not likely to fall out on their own. Persistent baby teeth should be removed at the time of spay or neuter since leaving them in causes damage to healthy, adult teeth.