

FELINE GROOMING TIPS

TRAINING YOUR PET TO TOLERATE TOENAIL TRIMMING

Some dogs and cats 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 toenails are cut too short, a dog or cat 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 sign 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, putting gentle pressure as you hold each foot and manipulate the leg. Do not attempt this exercise when your pet is in an agitated or playful state, 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 play time. 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 toenails, 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 shape of toenails 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 occasionally when toenails 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 or cat 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 or cat's 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.

Most cats rarely need to have their claws cut if they use a scratch post. If a cat is destructive or aggressive with its claws and either fails to respond to retraining or you cannot retrain it declawing may be an alternative. For the dog who enjoys regular outdoor activity, nail trimming may not be needed. In many cases, walking on pavement maintains a dog's nails at an acceptable length.

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FROM BEHAVIOR GUIDES FOR DOGS AND CATS 1996 EDITION

GROOMING YOUR CAT

Christine Church knew her cats' hair ended up in the darndest places: in computer drives, on the couch, on her work clothes, even in her morning coffee. However, her furnace repairman gave her a new reason to groom her cats. The root of her problem: hair from her 10 feline housemates clogging the motor.

Grooming a cat might seem redundant, since most cats do a great job of keeping themselves clean. But experts list many reasons for brushing: keeping the house cleaner, preventing hair balls, maintaining a lovely coat, bonding with your cat and possibly detecting tumors or other health problems before they endanger your cat's life.

Atlanta veterinarian Drew Weigner has cared for pets that are alive today because malignant tumors were caught during grooming. "These were removed promptly, while still small, and were cured," says Weigner, a diplomat to the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners. "I have no doubt these cases were discovered earlier and resulted in better outcomes because these cats were regularly groomed."

Diligent grooming can also reveal ear and skin problems, such as hair loss, dandruff and sores. If you notice debris and odd odors in the ears, call your veterinarian. Never insert or pour anything into them, Weigner says.

Perhaps grooming your cat seems too challenging or tedious, but done correctly it can be simple and rewarding. When Church, the Connecticut-based author of *Housecat: How to Keep Your Indoor Cat Sane and Sound* (Nowell Book House, 1998), pulls out the brush, her longhaired cat comes running. "Sammy gets really into it," she says. "He's funny to watch because he chews on the brush. He rolls over on his back so I can get his belly. He stretches out and purrs."

NAIL CLIPPING

Begin your complete grooming session by trimming your cat's nails, says certified master groomer Kathy Salzberg, writer and owner of The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. If your cat decides to swipe at you, at least the nails will be blunt. If it growls, spits and bears its claws, then you probably will want to leave this job to a professional groomer.

The following procedure takes only a few minutes and you only need to do it monthly, but you'll need a partner.

1. APPROACH THE CAT WITH CONFIDENCE. "If you're really nervous yourself, then they struggle more," Salzberg says. "Dogs and cats sense fear." Speak softly and soothingly. "I honestly believe cats love the sounds of our voices, and I talk to the cats a lot."

2. HAVE YOUR PARTNER HOLD THE CAT gently by the scruff of its neck, the way its mother would naturally. "It immobilizes the cat," Salzberg explains. Your partner should hold the cat's paws.

3. GENTLY PRESS YOUR THUMB ON THE PAD OF A FRONT PAW. The nail should extend. If it doesn't, put your cat's paw on the first finger of your hand. Place your thumb on the cat's first knuckle. Squeeze gently. The nail should slide forward.

4. CLIP THE CLEAR, HOOKED PORTION of each claw. Do it quickly, cleanly. Don't cut off more than the tip. Cutting the thick, pink quick, the vein that runs the length of the nail, will cause bleeding. If that happens, apply styptic powder to or rub a bar of soap across the nail.

5. REPEAT THE PROCESS for each paw. Rear nails usually grow shorter than front nails, so trim conservatively. "If people try to take off as much nail in the rear as in the front, they could clip into the quick and cause bleeding," says groomer Daryl Conner, whose Gone to the Dogs offers grooming house calls in Memphis, Tenn.

"Some cats don't much mind having their nails trimmed as they are being held and cuddled," Nanci York, groomer at Animal Care Center of Forest Park in Cincinnati. "Others may need to be wrapped in a towel for the procedure."

NEXT COMES A THOROUGH BRUSHING

Start this routine when a cat is young, if possible. Use a soft baby brush the first few times. Keep the brush near the chair or favorite place you usually sit with your cat, and conduct your grooming session there. Gently brush the spots where your cat likes to be touched. Then, work your way around its body. "If a cat doesn't seem to like it, work up slowly," York says. "In the beginning, just a few strokes may be all that are tolerated, but gradually [you] both become more comfortable with the process and may begin to enjoy it."

When your cat comes to accept brushing, give it the full treatment. How frequently you brush your cat and which tools you should use depend on the breed (see Tool Box and Different Strokes), but these guide-lines work for most:

1. USE A SLICKER BRUSH. "Using a soft slicker brush, go over the entire cat from the top of the head to the tip of the tail, following the lay of the coat. Holding the front of the cat up by the chest, brush down from the chest to the groin area. Lift the tail and brush the hindquarters thoroughly. Don't forget the areas behind the ears, under the chin and the backs of the hind feet," York advises.

2. USE A METAL-TOOTH COMB. Comb the entire cat with a metal-tooth comb to remove loose fur and tangles. The combs normally are sold in fine, medium or wide teeth. Use fine or medium on short coats; wide on long coats, says Joanne Howl, DVM, past president of the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association. Conners prefers medium for any cat, and adds the teeth should be round and smooth.

3. REMOVE TANGLES. Carefully comb out small mats by slowly separating the outer tangled hairs from the center of the mat. Sprinkling cornstarch onto tangles can help loosen them. Alternatively, use blunt-tipped scissors to trim small mats out of the coat. For mats that are a little larger, Howl advises this technique with the blunt-tipped scissors: "Turn the tips parallel to the lie of the unmatted fur, and cut down the center of the mat. Split each mat once or twice to begin to shorten the tangled hairs, then use a comb. You'll find that the shortened hairs pull out more easily and that you can eventually remove the mat without losing a huge chunk of fur." Leave large mats to a professional groomer or a veterinarian.

4. USE A PIN BRUSH for longhairs to remove loose fur.

5. STROKE THE CAT FROM HEAD TO TOE. This will help make the coat shine, Howl says.

It might look time-consuming, but you can brush your cat while watching TV "I tell pet owners to set aside a certain time each week," Conner says. "For instance, if they never miss the TV show *60 Minutes*, they should keep the cat comb near their favorite chair and spend that time combing kitty. A little catnip might sweeten the deal for some cats. A succulent treat can appeal to others."

DIFFERENT STROKES

We asked master groomer, Kathy Salzberg, owner of The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass., how often cats needed grooming, and she said it depends on the breed. Some examples:

PERSIANS, HIMALAYANS. Ideally, brush once a day. Realistically, twice weekly. Bathe every four to six weeks.

SPHYNX: Bathe weekly to remove the excess oil the hairless cat produces.

MAINE COON CATS, NORWEGIAN FOREST CATS: Brush weekly; bathe every two to three months.

SIAMESE, BURMESE, OCICAT, BENGAL: Rub weekly with a silk glove or chamois cloth. "These are really low-maintenance cats - for the busy person," Salzberg says.

AMERICAN SHORTHAIR, RUSSIAN BLUE, SCOTTISH FOLD, MANX: Brush weekly or every couple of weeks with a fine-toothed comb. "They can mat, even though they're shorthaired," Salzberg says.

CORNISH REX, DEVON REX: Use a groomers mitt occasionally.

BATHING

For some, the thought of bathing a squirming fuzz ball with claws inspires dread. Fortunately, while show cats need baths before competition, most indoor cats require a visit to the tub once a year or less, Howl says. Baths can save lives in those rare instances when cats step in antifreeze or poison, or if an outdoor longhair's coat becomes infested with maggots. Otherwise, gauge when your cat needs a bath by asking yourself if it smells bad or if it has a greasy or discolored coat. Bathing plays a role in treating some dermatologic conditions and removing external parasites such as fleas, says Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, DVM, of Orange, Calif., author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to A Healthy Cat* (Alpha Books, 1999, \$16.95).

Some tricks of the trade to make your experience easier:

1. GATHER YOUR TOOLS: a shampoo designed for cats (not dogs), towels, a hand-held spray nozzle or water pitcher and a sponge. If you can't convince someone to help you, get a figure-eight cat harness and leash. Place a plastic mat, milk crate or even a window screen in the bottom of the tub so your cat has something to grab onto and feels more secure. Put all your tools within reach of your intended bathing spot. "I like to use the kitchen sink. The level is easier for the groomer to work on, and the confined space seems to make a cat feel more secure," Cooper says.

2. FILL THE SINK OR TUB with a couple of inches of tepid water. Use your wrist to test the temperature. "It should be almost impossible to feel - neither hot nor cold," Howl says.

3. PUT YOUR CAT IN THE SINK OR TUB. Holding it gently by the scruff of the neck, lower it gently into the sink or tub while sweet-talking. Have your partner hold your cat in place, or use the harness.

4. GENTLY SHOWER THE CAT'S BODY with a spray nozzle or pitcher of warm water; keep the face dry. Be sure to hold the spray nozzle very close to the body; that hushes the scary sight and sound of running water. Avoid the eyes, ears and nose. "I usually wipe these carefully with a warm washcloth or baby wipe," York says.

5. APPLY THE GENTLE CAT SHAMPOO. Lather the coat lightly.

6. RINSE TWICE. "The rinse is the single most important part of the bath. Poorly rinsed coats are dry and itchy," Howl advises.

7. WRAP THE CAT IN A FLUFFY TOWEL and squeeze out the water. "Don't rub! This can cause tangles in the coat," York says.

8. DRY YOUR CAT. Air drying can take several hours. If you use a blow dryer, use the cool setting. Start at the hindquarters and brush the coat while aiming the dryer directly at the area, York says. Work from the rear of the cat to the neck, then from the chest to the groin. "Avoid the face and ears, as the air may irritate these areas," York says. "Most cats are frightened by the sound of the dryer and the forced air, so owners should be prepared for a violent reaction if this has never been attempted" she adds.

9. FINISH BY COMBING THE COAT.

10. REWARD YOUR CAT - and yourself, York says. Your pal may be in a foul mood, but it won't last as long as the pleasant scent and pretty appearance of the coat. If this sounds like too much to handle, you can hand the job over to a professional groomer or try a 'dry' bath. Pet-supply stores sell dry shampoos, which foam without water. Just massage in the special shampoo, let it dry, then brush your sweeter-smelling cat. You can also buy premoistened towelettes (or wet wipes) for spot cleaning or deodorizing pets. Still, experts consider dry baths second best to the real thing. Not all cats hate baths. "It depends on their personality," says Anne Francis, a Massachusetts-based groomer. "Some cats I groom, they practically do the backstroke in the tub. With luck and these guidelines, your grooming experiences will go swimmingly."

GATHER THIS GEAR FOR A PRETTY KITTY:

ALL CATS

- § Towel or rubber mat to prevent slipping in the sink or bathtub.
- § Nail trimmers with sharp blades and a smoothly working mechanism.
- § Cotton balls.
- § Olive oil for gently cleaning ears.
- § Styptic powder.
- § Ear-cleansing solution for cats.
- § Blunt-tipped scissors to trim matted fur.
- § Mild shampoo.

- § Toothbrush to clean the cat's face at both time.
- § Blow dryer set on low or medium to dry coat after a bath.

LONGHAIRED CATS

- § Wide-tooth steel comb with tooth at least on inch long.
- § Pin brush; its widely spaced bristles - made of metal or stiff nylon - remove loose fur.
- § Medium or coarse comb.

SHORTHAIRED CATS

- § Flea comb to check for fleas, dead hair and scabs or remove small knots.
- § Fine or medium-toothed metal comb that passes gently through non-matted fur; if your cat hates it, try a rubber brush with small nubs (not bristles).
- § Grooming mitt to polish and add shine.
- § Soft bristle brush.
- § Chamois clothe to wipe away dander and loose hair after grooming.

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***** Kitten Tip *****

An easy way to trim a kittens claws is to wrap a towel firmly around the kitten leaving one paw out to trim. Unwrap and do the same for the remaining paw. Using small baby nail clippers for tiny little claws makes it a snap.