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a pet for all seasons

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Get Your Groom On

Here's a Five-Step Treatment Plan for Families To Keep Their Canines Clean and Healthy

After a dip in the ocean at his favorite Hamptons beach or a roll on the Central Park grass, your pooch figures a vigorous shake, a lick here and there, and he's clean enough to relax on your favorite couch. Unfortunately, his idea of clean rarely compares to yours.

Frequent grooming is the best way to keep your dog looking great and his skin, coat, and nails in healthy condition. But if going to a professional groomer on a regular basis becomes too expensive or time consuming, following this five-step routine can help you achieve some beautiful results between expert visits.

The first step begins with a good cleaning of the ears and is recommended for all types of dogs. For breeds that have a small amount of hair growth in the ear, moisten a cotton ball with hydrogen peroxide and gently swab the inside flap. For longhaired breeds whose ear hair can get matted, purchase an ear powder available at your local pet store. Dust a small amount of the powder in the ears and wait until the hair becomes dry and brittle. Then use your fingers to pluck the unruly hairs out — using a quick, firm motion can avoid canine discomfort.

Trimming your dog's nails is the next step. If left unattended, some dogs' nails can grow to unruly lengths and become uncomfortable when they walk. According to Peter Kross, DVM and founder of the Rivergate Veterinary Clinic (212-213-9885), you must first determine if trimming your dog's nails is necessary.

"Dogs that regularly walk on pavement or those that play in the city's concrete runs might not need regular clipping, but those that spend most of their time indoors need to have their nails cut monthly," remarked Kross.

Since most dogs resist having their nails clipped, your veterinarian or professional groomer can show you the best technique and the proper tools, such as a canine nail clipper and styptic powder or pencil (a necessary purchase in case you cut a nail to the quick). Careless clipping can cause your dog a lot of pain, so if you have any doubts, leave the nail trimming to a professional.

A brush and comb is the easiest way to make your dog look presentable in a relatively short amount of time. Depending on your particular breed of dog, ask your local pet store to suggest the comb and brush best suited for the job.

At the upscale salon Karen's for People Plus Pets (212-472-9440), owner Karen Thompson likes to educate her clientele about coiffing in between professional groomings.



"A good brushing is always followed by a combing, thereby removing any tangles or mats still left in the coat. Trying to untangle wet, matted hair is a disaster," Thompson advised. She suggests using a pin brush for long-haired dogs who maintain show coats, a soft slicker to remove mats for dogs kept in puppy cuts, and a shedding blade and rubber curry brush to keep smooth-coated dogs looking great.

After your dog's coat is free of tangles comes a bath, the frequency of which should depend upon the arrival of that unique "doggy smell" associated with man's best friend. Have the following materials ready before you put your dog in the tub: canine shampoo and conditioner, a rubber mat to keep your dog from slipping in the tub or sink, a hose attachment for your spout used for rinsing, and one large towel. You may also wish to use a leash and collar so that your dog is less likely to flee the bath before you're done.

While letting the water run freely in the tub, carefully wet your dog's fur and gently rub shampoo into a lather, making sure to avoid splashing or getting soap in the dog's eyes and ears. Rinse well with your hose and repeat the shampooing and rinsing processes. Next, condition the coat with creme rinse and rinse thoroughly. Once the fur feels clean, gently squeeze the water out of the coat, blotting afterward with a large, dry towel.

Finish the job with a nice blow dry. Set your hair dryer to low/warm, and hold the dryer in one spot, taking care, of course, that the heat does not become too intense. As the hairs blow aside, brush the coat, continuing until there are no kinky hairs. Proceed with light, fast strokes until the coat is thoroughly dry.

Once you've mastered your techniques, you should be able to complete the entire job, toe to tail, in about two hours. Home grooming is a great way to spend some quality time with your pet and make him look and feel his very best. ■

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