Grooming articles

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| Beyond beauty: grooming for good health  by Eve Adamson  You already know that grooming makes your dog look lovely and smell sweet. But grooming is also one of the most important things you can do to maintain your dog’s good health. Regular grooming is a bit like a light version of a veterinary exam. That makes it extra important, not just for keeping your pup pretty but as the best possible way for you to establish what’s physically normal for your dog. Every time you put comb to coat, you have the chance to assess your dog’s ongoing health and detect any sudden changes in skin, coat, eyes, ears, nose, rear, paws, nails, joints, or generalised pain. If anything changes, you’ll be the first to notice.  Once-over rubdown An all-over rubdown is a great way to begin every grooming session. It loosens dead coat, increases circulation in the skin, relaxes your dog for grooming – and it’s also an important skin check. Lumps, bumps, rough patches, sores, or bare spots in the coat may be missed if you aren’t actually putting your hands on your dog in a methodical way. This is also an excellent way to determine whether your dog has picked up any ticks or fleas.  The once-over will alert you to other changes too. If your dog has a sore knee, hip, elbow, or shoulder, he may flinch or yelp in pain when you touch or rub him in that particular spot. If you find a lump, a sore spot, a bare patch, or anything else unusual and new, let your veterinarian know. Please don’t balk at telling the vet about a lump or bump because you’re afraid it might be cancer. It may be just a harmless, benign cyst. Or if it is, for example, a mast cell tumor – a common type of cancer that often manifests as a bump on the skin – early detection and treatment almost always result in complete recovery.  Orifice inspection It may not be the most pleasant chore, but gazing into your dogs’ eyes - and ears, nose, mouth, and rear end – is also an important part of a grooming health check. Problems often show up in these sensitive areas. Yeasty ear infections, gum disease, tooth decay, dry eye, impacted anal glands, even worms, are just some of the conditions that can be spotted visually. Call your vet if you notice any of the following: • Red, rashy ears • Excessive ear hair, with clumps of was and dirt • Runny nose • Foul breath • Red, infected areas on gums • Tartar on teeth • Loose or broken teeth • Red, irritated eyes • Excessively runny, watery eyes, or tearstains under eyes • Redness, rash, or sores around the rear end • Any foreign substance (flea dirt, tiny worms, or anything unusual) around the rear.  Now hair this! After checking your dog thoroughly, the next step in regular grooming is usually brushing or combing the coat. If you have a long-coated breed, this very important step can help you spot skin problems you might not be able to detect with your hands. Don’t just brush the top layer of hair: if your dog is having any kind of skin problem, it will be down at the roots, so that’s where you have to look. Combing all the way down to the skin can reveal hot spots and skin infections hidden under mats and tangles. You might also find evidence of fleas or an attached tick.  Regular brushing can also be a great way to assess a short-coated dog’s overall health. As you brush, feel and examine the state of your dogs’ skin and coat. Is the skin smooth and supple, or dry and flaky? Is the coat soft and shiny, or dry and brittle? If your dog is eating a healthy, high-quality diet with sufficient essential fatty acids, his skin and coat should be in great condition. If you notice they are not, talk to your veterinarian. Sometimes, the very first sign of a health problem is as subtle as a dried-out coat and flaky skin.  Behaviour assessment Beyond the actual hands-on aspects, grooming is also a special time to tune in to and bond with your dog. When you’re busy all day, it can be easy to miss subtle signs that your pet’s not feeling well. The best way to assess his behaviour during grooming is to minimise distractions. Turn off the television, the radio, the computer. Let grooming be the time when you focus on your dog, and nothing else. Without the normal distractions of life you may realise you’ve been noticing behavioural changes for a while, without really registering them.  Think about whether he’s been eating and drinking as usual, playing in the usual way, sleeping or resting more. Has he been reluctant to go on walks? Acting confused? Hiding? Scratching a lot? Dragging his rear end around the carpet? Limping? Following you around more closely than usual, or not following you around in the usual way? Each of these may – or may not – be a sign that your dog is experiencing the beginning stages of a health problem.  Veterinarians have often told me their clients were the first ones to spot the signs of serious health problems, such as cancer, skin infections, and even neurological conditions; in many cases, the pet owner spotted the first signs during a grooming session. You are the expert on your dog because you see him every day. Groom him daily, or at least weekly, so that if your dog does develop a healthy problem, you’ll catch it and can have it treated.  *This article first appeared in the AKC Gazette and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe to the Gazette, please go to www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm*    Inside-out grooming: how to practice good grooming without touching a tool by Eve Adamson  Grooming means brushing and combing, bathing and blow drying, nail trimming and teeth brushing – right? Sure it does; your dog needs those things for good health. But let’s step back for a minute and look at the big picture.  Grooming is about hygiene and health – maintaining your dog’s skin and coat, nails and teeth, and eyes and ears. But hygiene and health don’t just happen from the outside in; they also happen from the inside out. Your dog’s lifestyle has a lot to do with how easy or difficult grooming will be, and the right lifestyle changes could make all the difference when it’s time to break out the brush.  Try a better food What your dog eats has a big impact on his health, but it also affects his skin and coat. Dogs on poor diets tend to shed more and have dull, brittle coats. They may be itchier and suffer from skin allergies, rashes, and hot spots. These are the dog’s people talk about when they say, “I can’t give him too many baths or his skin get irritated”. On the contrary: not only is more bathing with a natural, chemical free shampoo helpful, but a better diet can help relieve those problems from – you guessed it – the inside out.  Poor diet can have a ripple effect. Poor skin and coat may be the first problem. Then dogs may become more susceptible to fleas and ticks, who seek out less healthy animals with problem skin. They may develop hot spots and bald spots. And they just don’t look as good.  Many pet owners report dramatic improvements in their dogs’ skin and coat after upgrading their food. Dogs on premium food tend to have much more resilient skin and shiny, silky coats. They may drop dirt out of their coats more easily, so you may not need to bathe them as often. A good diet may discourage fleas and ticks, and could even reduce shedding.  A better diet may also reduce tear-staining in some dogs and could improve your dog’s overall dental health. Because his stools will get firmer, denser, and less messy, a long coated dog may require less yucky rear end cleanup. A premium diet may seem more expensive, but the health benefits (and savings on future vet bills) more than make up for a higher price.  The best food for your dog’s skin and coat depends on your individual dog, his environment, and any food preferences and sensitivities he may have. In general, look for a food with whole-food natural ingredients like fresh meat, small amounts of whole grains (optional), and some fruits and vegetables. Some foods also contain probiotics and essential fatty acids, especially omega-3s, which support good health in general and good skin in particular.  Avoid foods with long lists of unrecognisable ingredients, by-products, and chemical additives. Some chemical names may be synthetic vitamins added to the food, but the label should specify that. Read the ingredients label, not just the claims on the front of the package.  When choosing a premium brand, either dry food or canned should be fine. Some people also see skin and coat improvement after feeding a refrigerated or commercial frozen raw diet. Many swear that a home-prepared cooked or raw diet is the secret to dramatically improved skin and coat, but talk to your veterinarian before you try making your own dog food, and be sure to include a good multivitamin supplement, as recommended by your vet.  Finding the right diet to maximise your dog’s skin and coat health may take a little trial and error, but don’t give up. A high quality food will ripple into every aspect of your dog’s life, especially grooming.  Try essential fatty acid supplement Essential fatty acids, especially omega-3s, work wonders on dogs, cats, and people. Some studies suggest that they reduce cancer risk, slow tumour growth, and reduce general inflammation in the body, including the kidneys. They support healthy cardiovascular function, and they can help turn dry coats into silky coats and itchy skin into strong, healthy skin. They can also reduce excessive shedding. Vets often prescribe essential fatty acid supplements for dogs with skin problems, but even healthy dogs (including puppies) can benefit from essential fatty acids.  Some dog foods contain essential fatty acids in the form of fish oils or flaxseed oil. Whether they contain enough to make a difference to your dog’s skin and coat is questionable. A better option is to buy a supplement that your veterinarian specifically recommends. Look for a supplement by a company you trust, there are many pet supplements out there – some good, some not so good – so buy from a company you or your vet trusts.  You can also add your own essential fatty acids to your dogs diet yourself by drizzling a little cod-liver or salmon oil, flaxseed oil, or olive oil on your dog’s food.  Try stress reduction Dogs get stressed just like people do, and when they are stressed they tend to shed more. A chronically stressed animal may be a chronically heavy shedder (although some breeds shed a lot even when they feel just fine). Stressed pets may also be less healthy, have more skin allergies, and be more susceptible to ear infections, runny eyes, and gastrointestinal problems.  And what stresses pets the most? *You!*Companion animals mirror our emotions – when you get stressed, your pet gets stressed. Studies have demonstrated that humans with elevated stress hormones respond to their pets in a way that raises stress hormones in the animal. Not only does your stress upset your dog, but you may be less likely to practice basic grooming chores when you feel overwhelmed or run down. Practicing a little stress reduction on your own can make a big difference in how stressed your pet gets, how much he sheds, and how healthy he is. Try deep breathing, getting more exercise, eating a healthier diet, and taking some time out for yourself every day – if not for you, do it for your dog.  Exercise and a healthy diet reduces stress in pets, too, so if you and your dog exercise together, you’ll be helping each other. Another important way to reduce your dog’s stress is to keep a schedule and stick to it most of the time. Dogs thrive on regularity: when they know someone is in charge and what to expect, they can relax.  Dogs will also be less stressed if you spend more time with them, which you can accomplish with mutual exercise, an obedience class, and just hanging around together. In fact, studies show that petting a dog relaxes people, lowering their blood pressure and levels of stress hormone. It also relaxes the dog, and is a sort of grooming in itself. As you pet your dog, you can massage his skin to increase circulation and, especially with smooth coated dogs, help distribute his natural coat oils. Most dogs thrive on human companionship, so schedule time for some cuddling and petting. You’ll both enjoy the stress reducing benefits of the human-animal bond.  Of course, even with a premium diet, essential fatty-acids, a regular routine, exercise, and bonding time, your dog will still need brushing, bathing, nail trimming, dental care, and possibly the occasional haircut, ear wash, or tearstain removal. But if you are already grooming your dog from the inside out, then grooming from the outside in will be a breeze.  *This article first appeared in the AKC Gazette and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe to the Gazette, please go to www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm*  Good grooming: your good grooming toolkit by Eve Adamson  You notice your dog is looking scruffy and smelling stinky. You just know he’s got a tangle behind his right ear, and his nails are tapping on the floor when he walks. Which of the following best describes what happens next?   1. You wonder where you put the dog brush, the comb, or the nail clippers. You spend 30 minutes looking for them. 2. You get everything ready for a bath, put your dog into the tub, then realise you are completely out of dog shampoo. 3. You think to yourself, “I should probably go buy a brush, a comb, nail clippers, and some dog shampoo.” 4. You grab your handy grooming toolkit and get right down to business.   If you answered 4, you can stop reading right now. If you answered 1, 2 or 3, then you, like most of us, could probably use a little help getting organised.  Grooming tools can be hard to keep track of. If you’ve got the dog shampoo bottles, in the shower, the brush out on the deck, and the nail clippers in the drawer next to the bathroom wastebasket, you could argue that everything is in the place where you will use it. But if you have all the necessary tools neatly organised in a waterproof caddy that you always keep in the same place, you’ll never waste a single minute trying to find the right tool for the right job.  In that spirit, let’s put together a grooming toolkit for your dog. You might already have everything you need, so assembling your kit will just be a matter of rounding everything up and putting it together. Or you might realise you need to add a few important supplies. Let’s begin by considering what your grooming toolkit should contain.  Universal tools and supplies A toy Poodle who visits a professional groomer every month won’t need the same tools as the Labrador Retriever who gets his baths and brushing at home, but there are a few things every dog will need in a grooming toolkit for good grooming at home. Gather what you have and make a note of what you need from the following list:   Brush - Depending on your dog’s coat, he may need a natural-bristle brush (for short coats), pin brush (for long and curly coats), slicker brush (for double coats and heavy shedders), or all three, depending on how much hair your dog has and what you want to do to it. A sleek Italian Greyhound might need just a soft-bristle brush, while a fluffy Pomeranian might benefit from a bristle brush, a pin brush, and a slicker brush. At a bare minimum, slicker brushes can remove shed hair from any kind of coat, so they are always good to have handy. · Comb **–** A steel comb with find and coarse teeth can be handy for any coat, from long and curly to short and smooth. Combs can help pick out fleas, tease out tangles and smooth the coat all over. · Nail trimmers or an electric nail grinder **–** Choose scissors-style or guillotine-style nail clippers, whichever you prefer, in a size appropriate for your dog, and keep them sharp. Some people prefer electric nail grinders, but avoid them for long-coated dogs because hair could get caught in the rotating mechanism. · Clotting agent **–** If you accidentally clip the quick, a styptic pencil or powder will stop the bleeding. · Toothbrush and paste made for dogs **–** Even if you aren’t brushing your dog’s teeth now, it’s never too late to start. Clean teeth equal better health and less expensive and extensive annual cleanings at the vet. · Dog shampoo **–** Even if you don’t regularly bathe your dog at home, it’s always a good idea to have a bottle of dog shampoo on hand, just in case your dog gets into something stinky and you can’t take him to the groomer immediately. Choose a formula suited to your dog’s individual needs, such as hypoallergenic, or a formula for your dog’s specific coat colour or type.  Customised tools and supplies Different breeds and coat types may have additional needs. Consider adding these tools to your kit, as they are relevant for your dog: · Electric clipper/trimmer, if you clip your dog’s coat at home · Blunt-tipped scissors, for dogs who need stray hairs trimmed · Small, battery-operated clipper, for trimming excess ear and paw hair · Coat rake or other de-shedding tool, for heavy shedders · Mat splitter or sharp scissor, to cut through mats in long coats. · Stripper knife, for stripping wiry coats, if you choose to do that · Hound glove/mitt or rubber curry comb, for rubbing and polishing smooth coats · Accessories, such as grooming bands for tying up a topknot, plus bows or other doggy bling if you and your dog are so inclined. · Bath wipes/baby wipes, for a quick one-over or to wipe off dirty paws when you don’t have time to give your dog a bath. · Crème rinse, for dogs with long or curly coats also useful for dogs with dry, brittle coats. · Conditioning spray, for preparing long or curly coats for brushing and combing, or an oil-based coat spray for shining and conditioning smooth coats and dry skin. · Blow dryer with low/cool setting · Ear wash, for dogs prone to dirty ears · Cotton balls, for wiping runny eyes and for keeping ears plugged and dry during bath time · Spot-on flea control product, if you use it · A towel, just for your dog  Putting it all together Now that you’ve assembled the contents of your grooming kit, take a look at how much stuff you have. This will give you an idea of how big of a container you will need. A waterproof container will be spray-proof when your dog shakes after his bath, and easier to clean, too.  Some good options include a plastic caddy with a handle (like a shower caddy or even a beach bag), a plastic box with a handle, a makeup box, or a toolbox. A handle will make the kit easy to grab and take wherever you need it. A box with different compartments for organising different products makes everything easy to find.  Keep your grooming toolkit in a handy spot like the bathroom closet or shelf by the back door. When it’s bath time, brushing time, nail-trimming time, or time to take your dog on vacation, you’ll have everything you need exactly where you need it.  Every time you use the kit, check that all tools are in good shape and that you have enough shampoo, conditioner, or other products. When something breaks or runs out, you’ll know immediately. Add it to your shopping list so you can replace the missing item right away.  Sometimes, one simple organisational step can make a world of difference. With a grooming toolkit, you might just groom you dog more often, and that’s good for everyone  *This article first appeared in the AKC familydog magazine and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe to the Gazette, please go to* [*www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm*](http://www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm) |