

Why should we groom our dogs?

7 March 2021

LARGE PRINT/DOWNLOADABLE VERSION

In the wild, dogs would have a parent or siblings; and/or an extended family that, especially when they were pups, who would groom them, and the 'happy hormones' released then reminds the pups of love and safety.



When dogs groom themselves, similar happy chemicals flood their system and reminds them times they were safe and all their needs were being met:

**a full tummy,
a warm safe place to sleep and go to the loo
and the company of their pack.**

**These are the primary needs you as their human will
recreate during decompression. And grooming is an
important part of this once first stage decompression and
quarantine has passed, no matter how long that first stage
may take.**

**So as you are now their pack, and especially while you
decompress your new pup, this job becomes yours to carry on!**
This can be why self grooming can turn to chewing, the 'happy
hormones' released can outweigh the soreness of the chewed
area afterwards, and while it's usually a **stress reaction**, could
also indicate the presence of (decompression or separation
anxiety) fear or active red mites ([Demodex](#)) which if it spreads
to losing fur round the eyes and on the tummy and legs, must
get treated by a vet.



Supplements and raw feeding helps keep nutrition levels up as Demodex is usually the result of stress and/or a low immune system; and humans can end up with Demodex too, if they are run down or stressed- but of course you can't catch it from your dog unless you are in constant super close contact (watch out if you have a kettle dog with Demodex!).

Not only do 'happy hormones' get released in the dog when they are groomed, but humans also can feel the same contentment and happiness doing it for their pups

So as their human, you can carry on and share those good feelings, and bond with your dog with basic brushing, lowering stress and blood pressure for both of you. And just like brushing your own hair, the stimulation of the skin helps with blood circulation and healthy hair growth.***

Your kids, with appropriate guidance from the adults in the house who have tried it first and know how to do it, can try it! And you can all sit down and watch YouTube videos on it, in family time, so you can all pull together to help care for your pup.



There are five main aspects of dog skin/nails/coat care

1. Brushing

Brushing also stimulates the skin and circulation and removes loose dander (often the cause of allergies- see our

[‘hypoallergenic dog’ blog](#)) Other particles that might become lodged in a dog’s coat are best removed too, such as burrs, dirt, pollen and (dried) mud. How regularly you brush very much depends on the length of the dog’s hair. However, you can brush a dog every day without any adverse effects as long as they slowly get used to being brushed (try a variety of brushes- some are worried by or try to eat brushes with handles and a curry comb can mimic stroking and be less stressful or easy to run off with!. It will depend on the dog so it’s a good idea to have ready a range of basic brushes to see what your dog responds to best. Most dogs love to be brushed, and those that don’t will learn to love it after they become accustomed to it. **Never use human hair straighteners, [shampoos](#) and conditioners, or chemical treatments on your dog**, and if you do use a hair dryer have on super low and only if the dog will tolerate it.

Brushing Guide (minimum, full, all over body brush)

- shorthaired dogs: once per month
- dogs with medium length hair: once per week
- longhaired dogs: daily.

Don’t forget- dogs spending more time outside need brushing more often than dogs that spend more time indoors.



And all should have a brush once they've slept and processed all the exciting experiences on their walk (pups should sleep at least twice as long as their walk lasts).

Chuck a towel down if they're muddy- mud's a lot easier to get off when dry especially if you don't have an outside shower to get the worst off before you go in. In fact, don't throw out any towels, bath or tea towels, as having a supply of them really does come in handy.



Towels are warm and retain heat as well as blankets do, and a tea towel is the perfect size to absorb an accident rather than using up lots of kitchen roll. But to be serious for a second, **never use heated rollers** in a dog's fur either... Finally, don't forget use the right brush! There are so many around it's hard to know which to get, so [our shop](#) has some tried and tested brushes and combs, and how to use them.



Of course you don't want your dog to be scared of grooming, but it needs to be the right brush or comb for the job. It does need to be able to get through the coat without pulling, and actually be able to get through the coat. A super soft brush won't snag on any mats and hurt your dog (long term though super soft brushes are for just for adding shine to a dog's coat in the last stages of grooming and should not be used alone for grooming even on a short haired dog), and curry combs mimics touch without being too close to your dog too soon as they decompress. **And never go into a dog's chosen safe space to groom!**

A dog with a double or even triple coat (which can be common in Romanian dogs) will need a rake or similar for the fluffy underfur as well as a curry comb (we sell these)



or brush depending on the length of the outer coat. Different fur has different needs and brushes and combs that work well for one type of fur won't do so well with another- just like humans. [YouTube has a lot of videos on how to groom a dog](#) whether short or long haired, big or small and we will be developing our own too, to be put on [our YouTube channel!](#)

2. Nail trimming

With groomers closed everywhere due to lockdown, and vets charging far too much to do it even if they will, as they have to prioritise urgent care over cosmetic, the sometimes scary task

of nail cutting comedown to the adopter. **DO NOT skimp on clippers, or use human ones-** make sure they pass proper standards else you'll end up with ripped, jagged or ingrowing nails. (We hope to stock a good selection of tried and tested by our team and adopters in the shop soon, but for now, here's a photo of the type of clipper you'll need- and they do come in different sizes!)



Some animals have problem nails that may grow back into their paws if they are not trimmed regularly. Not only is this condition painful, but it can also lead to infection. Nail trims are necessary to prevent this problem.

Regular pavement walks also wears down claws, but lockdowns can make this hard to do.

Beware however if any of your dog's claws are black! The

cuticle (skin) at the base of the nails is [very hard to see on black nails](#) and if you cut the cuticle, then it will bleed a LOT! [Check out reputable youtube videos](#) on how to trim nails, especially black ones. Or ask a vet or groomer for advice, **And never put coloured varnish or polish on your dog's nails. This is not cute.** (Same with fur chalks or paints.)



Often, dogs don't like to have their nails clipped and that dislike will only increase if you accidentally hurt them, so great care is needed. The *'click' noise of the metal cutters* can also scare them so get them used to the noise by operating them in the air, and introducing them to your dog at a distance in soft happy high tones. Gentle grinders (electric powered) are an alternative

or even a good old fashioned *emery board* (big size, as coarse as possible as well as a fine one to finish if there are any jags) though not many dogs will be patient enough to sit there while you recreate a dog salon! **There are quite a few ways to introduce nail cutting to your dog in a non threatening way: FIND SOME.** Also, there is a specific length to cut a dog's nails, that's very different to cutting human nails. Alternatives are nail grinders if your dog isn't worried by noises, but again a game can be made of introducing this new noise into your dog's life. The vibration such a device creates in the dog's foot might stress them too.



In case there is an accident leading to a bleeding nail, whether from clipping or at home, or them getting it caught on a walk:

AT HOME

- an alum block or powder (very fine! Eye hazard in the wind, so perhaps more practical is a)
- styptic powder/pencil
- or leucillin (colloidal silver) liquid on hand
- liquid skin/surgical glue or strips

ON WALKS/HOLIDAY

- a pre made swab
- or a pack of styptic matches
- or a mini leucillin rollerball
- or 'liquid' skin strips/ pipettes/ single use sachets

in your [pocket tin](#) or [wallet](#) for walks; for the matches you just wet the end and apply it to the cut and apply to the nail area to stop the bleeding, for the swab or liquids they can immediately be applied. It can sting, which may further startle your dog. Let them rest and process in peace, don't make too much of a fuss of them, and leave nail trimming for another time. If out, gently walk them back to the car or home etc unless they won't put their paw to the ground, then you may well have to carry them!

3. Bathing



Average dog bathing can be once a month, but once a week is not too often especially with dogs that love the mud or rolling in smelly stuff on walks! Any more than that can dry a dog's skin, and even if you bathe your dog weekly, use a shampoo formulated for dogs that moisturises the skin so you don't strip their coats of essential oils. If your dog is very skittish on arrival, do not rush a bath, and wait till they feel comfortable enough with you for you to feel they are ready for a bath. But note- many rescue pups are very scared of a bath especially at first:

- the noise of the shower head, hose or tap
- warm water
- the smell of the shampoo if it's different to one they've smelt before
- the feel of a bath under their feet (and sometimes even anti slip mats go flying when four little feet are skidding on it in all directions!)

all of these may mean you end up as soaked as the dog! Especially if you don't get that towel ready and they shake themselves...Keep it slow and steady, use water jugs at first if they nope at the noise of the water coming out of a shower or faucet, and if they don't get properly bathed the first time (or if they say no thanks to a bath for some after they come home) don't worry, they'll get there in the end. Just gently use the pet perfume if they're too worried to be bathed and have a bit of a pong to them! Some dogs like a lick mat (you can get them with suction cups so they stick vertically to tiles) if they are particularly treat led, as a distraction. It is best not to make a big deal of what's happening, keep your voice soothing and be prepared to stop at any time and try again later as long as all the shampoo is out of their fur.

Towelling dry- some dogs will get calmer if their head is under the towel, some will want to play, some will freak if you try and cover their heads. Only gentle care, trying different ways and time will tell how your dog will prefer to be dried, if at all especially at first, so if you are giving them a bath, give it in the day time if you can so they have a good few hours to dry off, rather than risking a chill at night. Once they are touch dry they can 'steam' for a bit in a spare dry towel once you have the worst of the wet off, or lightweight blanket if the towel is too heavy for them, or they keep shrugging it off.

4. Haircut



Many dogs are no fan of haircuts, but it is sometimes in the best interest of dogs with medium or long hair, especially in the warmer months. How often this is done is solely based on the comfort of the dog- and tangles/mats must be removed gently, especially if they start close to the skin. When hair gets in an animal's eyes and blocks their vision, it needs to be trimmed. Some dogs have fur that constantly grows between their pads as well, and keeping that at a length that keeps it tangle free (just trim across the pad at its highest point, too short and it might prickle and irritate.) 'Fashion' cuts are the preference the adopter within reason/breed mix context, but we do not advocate 'dog paints' or 'dog chinks' when you are grooming your dog to make them 'pretty colours'.

[Dog hair does not grow as fast as humans](#) so be really sure the

clip is what the dog needs- UK weather is changeable and you don't want them to get a chill, plus there are many breed mixes who should not be clipped or shaved in normal circumstances. Plus some dogs, often called 'hypoallergenic' have hair not fur, but it still needs to be groomed, and often clipped more than dogs with fur, though both are made of the same substance- keratin. This is the same stuff their, and our. nails remade out of- keratin.

5. Ear care



This is no easy task- if you think it's going to go like the photo above you may be in for a shock-as even the most chilled of pups often doesn't want you to be this close up and personal! So keeping foreign matter (dirt, sand) or general cleaning out of a dog's ears can be a difficult task. As decompression passes, you can gently fuss the dog's ears as part of your increasing levels of fuss and engagement, and/or part of the increased grooming time (any dog from a kill shelter take care, they will have a scar on one ear from the kill shelter tag and they may be sensitive there). Daily inspection of the ears (whilst

grooming as a distraction for example) is the best way to keep them clean and healthy.

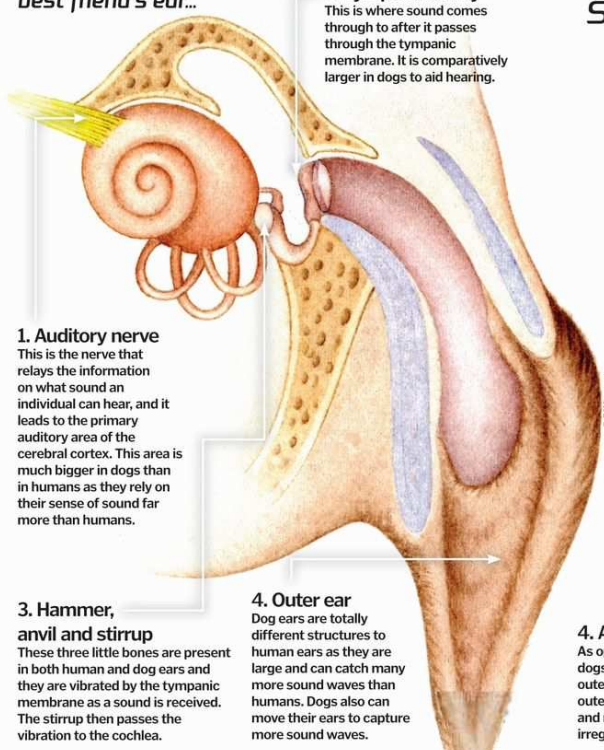
A gentle ear cleansing needs to be performed when necessary using a product specifically designed for this purpose. With active dogs, especially those that swim frequently, this might need to be done more often, but once every week or so is typically all that is necessary. You can get handy finger shaped wipes to unobtrusively clean inside dog's ears, gently and carefully, so it feels like fuss and is a smooth and stress free as possible part of the grooming process.

DO NOT use cotton buds!

Aloe vera, coconut oil or [apple cider vinegar](#) (keep this last one well away from eyes) on a thin cotton pad or sterile finger wipe is a good general cleaner, and often a cheap preventive for ear infections. Doing this regularly could save you a trip to the vets for expensive (and often traumatic for dogs and owner) ear drops or worse, having to anaesthetise them and get their ears syringed. Don't use over the counter human ear drops. Dog and human ears are made very differently.

Inside a dog's ear

The anatomy of man's best friend's ear...



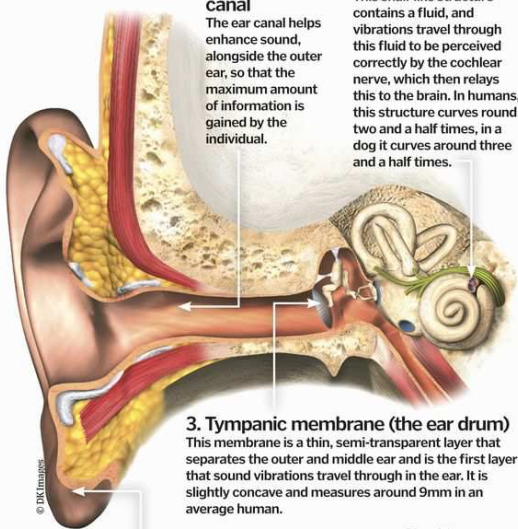
1. Auditory nerve
This is the nerve that relays the information on what sound an individual can hear, and it leads to the primary auditory area of the cerebral cortex. This area is much bigger in dogs than in humans as they rely on their sense of sound far more than humans.

2. Tympanic cavity
This is where sound comes through to after it passes through the tympanic membrane. It is comparatively larger in dogs to aid hearing.

3. Hammer, anvil and stirrup
These three little bones are present in both human and dog ears and they are vibrated by the tympanic membrane as a sound is received. The stirrup then passes the vibration to the cochlea.

4. Outer ear
Dog ears are totally different structures to human ears as they are large and can catch many more sound waves than humans. Dogs also can move their ears to capture more sound waves.

“One of the major differences in biology is the size and shape of the outer ear”



1. Auditory canal
The ear canal helps enhance sound, alongside the outer ear, so that the maximum amount of information is gained by the individual.

2. Cochlea
This snail-like structure contains a fluid, and vibrations travel through this fluid to be perceived correctly by the cochlear nerve, which then relays this to the brain. In humans, this structure curves round two and a half times, in a dog it curves around three and a half times.

3. Tympanic membrane (the ear drum)
This membrane is a thin, semi-transparent layer that separates the outer and middle ear and is the first layer that sound vibrations travel through in the ear. It is slightly concave and measures around 9mm in an average human.

4. Auricle (outer ear)
As opposed to the large outer ear seen on dogs, humans have a comparatively small outer ear made up of cartilage. Human outer ears are also immobile with hollows and ridges we see forming a type of irregular funnel, leading into the ear canal.

Inside a human ear

How do we hear and decipher sounds?

If your dog is a wanderer and prone to diving into muddy puddles or swimming in lakes, it is important to give them a good visual inspection every day for parasites, injuries, and other potential problems.

Basic Grooming For Dogs – Step By Step

Do you know how to groom a dog?

The basics are not that hard to learn. If you start on your dog, you can take your time till the dog knows and trusts you.

- Get rid of loose hair with a comb or brush BEFORE bathing or on DRY fur- dog fur wet is not easy to brush at all! Experiment with various types of brushes and combs until you find the right one for your dog's type of fur. Then, get the pup slowly used to a thorough brushing and get rid of as much loose hair as you can.
- Then, you can start trimming. Suggested areas are behind the ears for long fur prone to mats, and the fur ('feathers') on their legs. Often there is hair on the underside of the paws and around the paws that need to be trimmed away too. Also cut away any hair that could get messy when the dog goes to the bathroom, or straggles on the belly that drag in the water and mat and get tangled. Hair scissors and [trimmers](#) both work for this, but care and practice is needed, so get back on YouTube if you're not sure how to use them, or have a chat with your local groomer.
- If you want a fancier cut, then consult a professional, book or website devoted to your breed of dog for details on how to achieve the cut. DO NOT use human hair techniques!
- Next, cut the dog's nails. Be careful not to cut too much, or they will bleed. Have some styptic powder on hand (soon to be available in our shop) just in case.

Now it's time for the bath.

- Make sure you use a shampoo made especially for dogs and follow the directions.
- If the shampoo is supposed to be diluted, then be sure you do that first.
- A small dog can probably be bathed in a sink, otherwise, use a tub. Don't put in too much water and make sure it is a proper temperature before you put in the dog. Beware- they may be scared of the noise of a shower head, so use water jugs if you prefer to have running water.
- Close the bathroom door, so the dog doesn't escape and shake all over the house!
- When rinsing out the shampoo, rinse a lot, until all traces of shampoo are gone. *It is bad for the dog's skin to leave traces of shampoo*, and the skin could get irritated. It is the most important thing to remember when giving the bath.
- Don't do the dog's head until you have washed the rest of them, and then do it carefully. Make sure no shampoo gets in the eyes. Also, once a dog gets their head wet, they want to shake and will spray water all over you!
- Finally, let the dog out of the tub, bathroom or wet room, and towel them off as much as you can.
- You can also try a hair dryer, but some dogs will not tolerate the noise, so you might need to let him air dry air or wrap on a towel, doggy 'dry bag' or blankets.
- If it is cold outside, make sure your dog is dry before you let them out, so they doesn't catch a cold. and watch them, as they may well rollin mid or something horrible to get all those fascinating smells back!
- Once the dog is dry, brush them out again to get rid of any more hair that might have loosened, check for mats, and do a final trim of any stray hairs.

***** Most importantly of all, if you find your dog really does not like being groomed, and/or while your dog is decompressing, keeping the balance of letting them settle**

in peace and touching them to groom them can be tricky. We repeat: never go into their safe space to groom them: always wait till they start coming over to you and are not showing submissive language.

If they start to lick or pant, or turn away, stop and let them process those few minutes of touch. But grooming, especially with low impact soft birches and curry comb that mimics a hand without direct touch can be a way to healthily bond with your decompressing dog without the danger of fear bonding.

TYPICAL ADOPTER FAQs answered:

Who can I contact for help and advice on grooming, especially in quarantine and decompression?

Fear bonding we take very seriously, you CANNOT overdo it with your dog and make them do too much too soon else they will get separation anxiety and reactive in and out of the house. We provide LIVE online after care 4 days a week 12 hours a day live for all adopters, and out of hours messages can be left at ANY time- so use it, and please follow our decompression terms and conditions.

I think my dog is still too scared for grooming, I am worried they are not decompressing.

This could just be they are a lava dog and remember, it can take months and more! But should you be concerned this is happening, and your dog may be fear bonding (especially likely with a kettle dog), **IMMEDIATELY back off from your dog and reboot decompression- and always refer to our decompression blogs and documents (terms and conditions)** you were sent first, to check you're doing everything right, **then come to our online aftercare chats any**

time for extra advice!

There really is no excuse to decompress a dog wrongly.

When should I start to groom or bathe my dog once they are here?

DO NOT START TO TOUCH or GROOM YOUR DOG TOO FAST. And we can't say it enough- **DO NOT go into their safe space to groom or clean them when they are decompressing or processing a new experience like a walk or visitors.** If they're not ready for a bath or brush, use a little [pet perfume](#) if they're 'fragrant' (put on you too so they associate the smell). **The EARLIEST** we recommend bathing or starting to groom from a distance is **AFTER DEFRA quarantine has ended, NEVER with a chemical flea shampoo,** and once your dog starts coming over to you independently (**lava dog**) or once they have **proper sleep** (i.e. they don't leap up when you move) and start leaving you alone a little (**kettle or armpit dog**). If in doubt, ask on the support chat once your dog has arrived and you have found out [if they're a 'kettle' dog or think the floor is lava.](#)

Our shop stocks most of not all of the products listed in this blog, and more tried and tested items by our team and adopters are coming in all the time! If you think of a product you think we should stock, send us a message on the website!

FURTHER READING

For more on [dogs and self grooming](#)

For more on [how to bathe a dog](#) _

For more on [dogs' hormones](#)

For more on [human hair products that could harm your dog.](#)