

NAIL HEALTH AND MAINTENANCE

“WHO SHOULD TRIM MY DOG’S NAILS?”: You’ve gone through all the effort of playing with Fido’s feet and yet he hates having his nails trimmed! All too often that’s the story we hear when we see your pet here for their nail trims. Though there is a confidence that comes from years of performing this seemingly simple task, you must forgive yourself for not being able to do them at home. Nerves are running high, your pet is more confident at home and, much like human children, they probably know how to put on a scene big enough to make you stop and want a stiff drink! Even seasoned stylists will have another team member do their pet’s nails in our salon! They just don’t act the same with “auntie” as with mom. A very important thing to remember is regular nail trimming is something that should never be avoided just because your pooch has a strong reaction to it. Rather just making the switch to a professional, at least until the fear or anxiety fades is the best and safest option. There is no worse combo for a nail trim than a nervous Pet Parent trying to trim their nervous pet's nails. Things can get bloody and traumatizing for all involved.

“HOW OFTEN SHOULD I BE GETTING MY DOG’S NAILS TRIMMED?” Now that we’ve set the stage for WHO should be trimming your pet’s nails, let’s talk about frequency. There’s no one-size-fits-all in this. Activity, age, breed, lifestyle and so many other factors apply! For example, a dog that is extremely active, but runs in a yard with soft ground will need his/her nails checked/trimmed more frequently than a dog that goes for regular walks on a paved sidewalk. In that scenario, the pavement is a great nail file and keeps those nails nice and short. When we take things like breed into account, a little, short legged Dachshund simply doesn’t have legs long enough to make a big enough stride to file them down on his/her own. Even seasons can play a factor, in Manitoba anyway. Owners may notice their pets’ nails seem to “grow faster in the winter”. In reality, it’s seeming this way only because there are fewer rough surfaces to do any natural filing. Because of all the variables, the long and the short on frequency is to check your pet’s nails at least once per month and start taking note of his/her specific frequency needs.

“MY DOG’S NAILS ARE SOOOOOO LONG! WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?!” The first thing to know is you’re not alone in this. Because so many dogs don’t like the process, it’s not uncommon for us to see nails that are quite long. There is a vein that runs through your dogs’ nail, it is called the “quick”. If trimmed too short that quick will bleed and a cauterizing powder will be needed to stop any bleeding and discomfort. Though it is never our first option to “cut nails back”, there are times when it is the most humane option. For example, a dog whose nails are excessively long will start to splay his/her toes to accommodate for the length as he/she continues to walk on them. With the long nails bent to the side and the toes now splayed with every step, arthritis and joint pain starts. Each step becomes painful. The way your dog begins to walk to compensate also puts him/her at risk for further injury and arthritis in joints like the hips and shoulder. At this point, the brief discomfort of cutting back those nails and putting a numbing cauterizing powder on becomes the clear, most humane choice for the pet. For dogs where it hasn’t gotten to the point of arthritis or painful walking but the nails are still too long, there is a solution! A protocol of trimming every 2 weeks for approx. 4-6 months can push back those quicks allowing us to trim shorter and shorter every time without them bleeding. The quick doesn’t like to be at the end of the nail and will die off slowly. By trimming away shreds of nail to barely expose the end of the quick (without making it bleed), it continues to die off and we can get them shorter and shorter with every visit.

"I'M POSITIVE THAT MY DOG'S NAILS CAN BE CUT SHORTER! THEY ARE WHITE AND I CAN SEE WHERE THE QUICK IS, WHY DIDN'T YOU TRIM AS SHORT AS YOU COULD HAVE?": Though it may look that way, there is a reason why we stopped! When you look from the top and think you're seeing the end of the vein, you are actually only seeing the part of the vein that is running through the top of the nail. As the nail curves downward, the vein takes a nose-dive and switches to running on the back side of the nail. If we were to cut where it looks like we could have from the top view, we would have cut right into your dog's quick. This is a common mistake amongst do-it-yourself'ers at home. They usually only make this albeit innocent mistake once before seeking a professional. Rest assured, when we are trimming your dog's nails, we are using more cues than the top view and are getting your dog's nails as short as possible for you!

"WHAT IS A STRESS FRACTURE?" Good question! When a pet's nails become a little too long for the weight, activity, or lifestyle of a dog, as they walk and put pressure on their curved nails, small fractures begin to appear in the crook of the nail. When trimmed (or even during play/activity), these shards can fall off exposing the quick that it was serving to protect. This puts your pet at risk of discomfort and you at risk for cleaning up a blood bath. Keeping your pet's nails in good condition and at a good length is a great preventative measure. Also keeping a cauterizing powder on hand at home (corn starch or flour in a pinch) is also a great idea. You can pick this up at our salon at any time!

"YOU MENTIONED BREED AS BEING A FACTOR IN INCREASED FREQUENCY. WHAT ARE SOME BREEDS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?": We mentioned Dachshunds earlier as a breed that cannot create a long enough stride for a successful natural file. All long and low breeds such as Bassett Hounds and Corgi's also fall into this category. Breeds like ShihTzu's and Pugs struggle with nail curling. These nails have a natural tight curl to them and without regular maintenance; they can even grow right into the pad! That is very painful and of course carries the risk of the pad becoming infected. In most of these cases, it is best to cut the nails back to a safe length, regardless of where the quick is. The cauterizing powder that we use has a numbing agent to it and is also an antiseptic and will keep the vein safe as it calluses over within a day or two. A far better option than a painful hole in the pad, a vet visit, wound flushing protocol and a round of antibiotic! The small pinch they feel before the numbing powder is applied is a small price to pay when considering the alternative.

Nail health and maintenance is important to monitor and continue to address throughout the life of your pet. Checking his/her nails monthly is best and even pre-scheduling nail trims as you become familiar to your dog's nail cycles will help streamline the process for you! We are always here to help you along your pet's nail trimming journey. We've seen it all and being proactive can save your pet painful events and save you an expensive Veterinary visit. After reading all about nail health and maintenance, we hope you feel more confident, better informed and think we totally NAILED it!