

# Grooming

---

## Brushing and Combing

Brushing your puppy is an important **bonding** time for both of you. This is a wonderful time to build **trust** in the relationship.

Check the brush and comb you are going to be using to make sure they do not scratch your puppy's skin. Some combs and brushes have sharp edges, and they can hurt. When this happens, your puppy will become concerned every time you try to groom him. If you are using a slicker brush, use one that has cushioning for the teeth and make sure that the actual teeth have been rounded off so they are not sharp. By checking tools before they touch your puppy, many grooming concerns can be eliminated.

If your puppy is afraid of the brush or comb, and he tries to bite you or the grooming tool, stop brushing or combing him immediately. Offer him the brush or comb to feel and taste. If he wants to bite it, let him. Give him a minute or so to check out this new object with which you are trying to touch him. When he looks away, that is a sign that he has finished checking out the new item and you can begin again.

Once the puppy has had an opportunity to explore the brush or comb, slowly start to brush him again. If he pulls away or cries, immediately stop again. Talk to your puppy and give him some pets and treats to take his mind off what just happened. Do something else with him for a while and try again later in the day. The next time you try to brush or comb him, offer a few tiny treats as you use the back of the brush or comb to slide on his body. This will offer him a different kind of petting feeling without teeth. **Talk softly, reassure** him, and offer **treats** to reward this quiet behaviour as you are using the back of the comb or brush. After a few strokes, turn the brush or comb over and lightly do one stroke. If he accepts the stroke, be sure to praise him and keep the treats coming.

If he tries to bite, cries, or squirms, stop again. Ask him for a simple cue such as *sit* and then mark and reward him and end the grooming session on a positive note. You can try again later the same day or the next day. For now, do not give the puppy too much attention and go about your normal daily activities.

Some puppies can be very sensitive about being groomed and will need time to work through this procedure. The most important piece of this exercise is to teach your puppy that you are paying attention to his concerns and stopping when he asks you to. In time, he will learn to trust you enough to allow brushing and combing. Remember that this is not a race, and it is important for you and your puppy to have a **positive experience**. Grooming your dog can be a wonderful bonding opportunity, and every dog needs grooming. Work with your puppy using the brush and/or comb every day. Stop if your puppy cries, squirms, or tries to bite you. If the problem persists after several days, consult with our vet because your puppy may have a medical issue you are not aware of that is causing this reaction. If our vet does not find a medical reason for your puppy's reaction to being groomed, do not

give up. Give your puppy the time he needs to become comfortable with this procedure. In time, he will begin to trust you and learn that brushing or combing will not hurt him. When this happens, he will become comfortable with being groomed and this can become a special time for both of you.

## Ear Cleaning

Checking your puppy's ears and keeping them clean can prevent infections and funguses. A number of products are on the market to keep your puppy's ears clean. Ask our vet which product is best for your puppy.

Floppy ears can be a haven for **yeast** to grow, and this can be very uncomfortable for your puppy. To clean your puppy's ears, **only use products specifically made for dog ears**. Baby oil, rubbing alcohol, or non-ear cleaning solutions are not recommended. Products such as these can cause more harm than good to your puppy.

Many ear problems have a strong odour. If your puppy's ears have an odour, make an appointment with our vet. **Ear problems need attention as soon as possible**. The longer you wait to take your puppy to the practice, the worse the problem will become and the more **painful** it will be for him.

When checking your puppy's ears, the first thing you will want to do is to get him comfortable with having his ears touched. You can start off by petting his ears. If he does not like you touching his ears, then stop petting them for now. If he pulls away at any time while you are touching his ears, do not force him to accept the touch. This will only make him more concerned. Stop what you are doing and offer him a few little treats to take his mind off your touching his ears.

Offer your puppy a treat with one hand, and pet his ear with your other hand. If your puppy is now comfortable and does not pull away, you can lift up his ear and put it back down. If he still seems comfortable, you can look inside each ear and smell it. If he is sensitive to his ears being touched, you will want to desensitize him to having them checked and/or cleaned. You can do this by **spending a minute or so a day touching his ears**. Do this several times on each ear until your puppy seems comfortable and shows no signs of concern.

Next, try picking up one ear flap between your thumb and fingers. Lightly hold onto the ear and gently slide your hand out to the end of the ear. If the puppy shows any concern by crying, squirming, or trying to bite you, that is his way of asking you to stop. When you honour his concerns, over time, he will learn that you can be trusted. Once trust is established, life can be easier for both of you. A few minutes later you can try again. Again, pet his ears with one hand while offering him a treat with the other hand. Try again to pick up the ear with one hand, and slide your hand down the ear gently while offering the treat with the other hand. Repeat this as many times as you need to, stopping every time he shows signs of concern. If he is still concerned after one or two minutes, stop for now, give him a nice pet along his back, or do something else you know he enjoys and try again later. You always want to **end training sessions on a positive note**.

Within a few days, the puppy will become more comfortable with having his ears touched. Once he is comfortable with the ear slides, pick up one ear at a time and look down into the ear canal. You will not be able to see all the way down into the canal, which is why smelling your puppy's ears is so important. The odour will alert you that something is wrong. Sometimes you will see redness or the ears seem to have a build-up much like ear wax in humans. This can be a sign of a fungus in the ear. If your puppy's ears have a **bad odour** or seem **discoloured**, make an appointment for him to **see our vet immediately**.

Checking your puppy's ears **at least once a week** and following an **ear-cleaning regimen that our vet recommends** will help keep puppy's ears healthy and clean.

## Nail Trimming

Many puppies have a concern with having their nails trimmed. This is actually very understandable. To your puppy, his feet are the major means of escape when in danger of any kind. With that in mind you will want to let him know that touching his feet or trimming his nails is safe for him. **Your puppy will need nail trimming throughout his entire life**. When nails are not properly trimmed, the living centre of the nail (the quick) will continue to grow along with the nails. When this happens, it can cause discomfort and result in physical problems.

When trimming your puppy's nails, the first thing you will want to do is to get him used to having his feet touched by desensitizing him. The easiest way to accomplish this is by following your puppy's lead. Always **move slower if you have a fearful puppy**. Fearful puppies should be encouraged and rewarded for being brave with any new experience.

You can begin these exercises while you are holding your puppy in your lap or while sitting on the floor with him. Learning moments are everywhere for young puppies, so take advantage of them whenever possible with short learning moments. Take your hand and slide it down your puppy's leg and pick up one paw at a time. If he is okay with you doing that, then take a finger and slide it between each toe of that paw. If he is comfortable with you playing with his feet and sliding your finger between each toe, you can repeat the exercise on each paw. **If he pulls away or cries, stop immediately**. Wait a minute or so and offer him a treat with one hand as you slide the other hand down his leg again. **If he pulls away, stop**. If he is more interested in the treats than what you are doing with the other hand, then continue. Every time you start and stop, make sure you start sliding your hand from the top of his leg. This is an exercise of **trust** and **confidence**, so always start at the top, where he was comfortable. Then work your way down toward the paw.

Remember, if your puppy is not comfortable at any time, it is okay to stop and try again later that afternoon or the following day. If you stop when he shows concern, over time he will begin to trust you. Continue to repeat the exercise until all of his paws have been desensitized to your touch.

Once he is comfortable, the third or fourth time you touch his paws and slide your fingers between them, it is time to introduce the **nail clippers**. Let your puppy sniff, lick, or bite the newly introduced clippers. Once he is done exploring the clippers and ignores them, it is time to introduce the new sound the clippers will make. This can be done by opening them

and closing them before you actually use them. *Make sure you do not have any part of the puppy in the clippers while opening and closing them.* If the puppy is bored and looks away, then you can begin the nail trimming process.

When trimming your puppy's nails, you want to clip them **right before the quick**. If he has clear nails, you can see the pink colour of the blood vessels. If his nails are black, start near the tip of the nail and slowly clip small pieces at a time, moving up the nail. A **tiny black circle in the centre of the nail** should be your warning that you are at the beginning of the quick, so stop. If you are not sure where the quick is or at what angle to hold the clippers, ask one of our nurses or vets some guidance.

**If at any time your puppy pulls away, remember to simply stop** what you are doing. Play with him for a while and try again later. You do not have to trim all of his nails on the same day when you are getting him comfortable with the nail trimming process. For now, the focus is on desensitizing him to having his paws touched and nails trimmed.

With time and patience, your puppy can become very comfortable with getting his nails trimmed. If you force him to have his nails cut, you will instil fear that can *last a lifetime*, making nail trimming a very difficult process for you and for him. Once mature, some dogs actually end up having to be sedated to have their nails trimmed. This makes a simple process very difficult and costly. Investing the time in your puppy now will eliminate this problem in the future.

When you trim your puppy's nails, always have a product such as Quik Stop® on hand in case you do cut the quick by accident. This product helps to stop the bleeding quickly.

## Teeth Cleaning

Cleaning your puppy's teeth regularly will promote **healthy gums** and **clean-smelling breath**. Many puppies, though, are a bit concerned with having someone inside their mouths. Since your puppy's teeth will need daily attention, you will want to get him comfortable with you working on them. To make this a pleasant experience, you will want to desensitize his mouth.

Start off slowly and take your puppy's lead. **Whenever he pulls away, squirms, bites, or cries, stop what you are doing.** If you stop when he shows any sign of concern, he will soon begin to trust you. When your puppy's concerns are ignored and you continue what you are doing, he can become fearful or show signs of aggression, which makes teeth cleaning harder on both you and your puppy. By acknowledging his concern and stopping what you are doing, you build trust with him.

You can begin desensitising his mouth by rubbing your finger on the outside of his lips gently. If he is comfortable with this light touch, you can slip your index finger into the mouth and rub his teeth and gums gently with your finger. After a few days, if you have stopped every time he showed any sign of concern, he will become comfortable with these touches.

Now it is time to introduce him to his toothbrush. Let him **smell, lick, or bite** on this new object. When he becomes bored with the toothbrush and looks away or ignores the brush, it is time to introduce it to his mouth. Begin by wetting the brush a little and using the dental cleanser you received from our practice. **Never use human toothpaste**; it is harmful to your puppy. Wet the brush to make it a bit more slippery so it does not stick to his lips.

Once the puppy is comfortable with having his teeth brushed, you can add a cue such as “Toothbrush time” or whatever word or words you would like to use to let him know it is time to get his teeth brushed. Since dogs are capable of learning by example, let your puppy be in the bathroom with you while you brush your teeth. When you are done cleaning your teeth, tell your puppy it is his turn to brush his. Many puppies will wait patiently and enjoy having their teeth cleaned.

Remember to move slowly when desensitizing your puppy’s mouth. Stop when he shows any sign of concern. Repeat the exercises a few times a day over many days. Your reward for the time and patience you give him now will last a lifetime.



*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us*