

Can someone please pass the hair straighteners?

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If this area is overlooked, ignored or dealt with incorrectly (even with the best of intentions), problems will start to occur.

On this occasion I am talking about medium to long haired pets such as Cocker Spaniels, Bichon Frise, Lhasa Apsos, Yorkshire Terriers, Bearded Collies, and Persians.

Conditions such as nails growing into pads (think wearing toe pinching

stilettoes constantly), ear infections due to lack of cleaning and plucking (unfortunately their paws can't work the Remington ear hair trimmer), skin complaints, and knots, to name a few, are very common.

Frizz, knots, can't find the itch, or just simply stinky? This may resemble some of our own bad hair days, but for some dogs this is a constant daily battle. OK, so it might be for you too, but perhaps that's best not discussed here!

Grooming our beloved dogs is a necessity not a luxury. Our own hair has to be washed and cut regularly; plus how much better do you feel when you've 'had your hair done'? Pets are no different.

Behaviour issues, as well as an unwillingness to be handled, can and do easily follow. This makes bathing and grooming difficult, sometimes impossible for owners and the professionals. You thought your toddler was a nightmare at the hairdressers, trust me, you've seen nothing!

Knots are painful and uncomfortable, and it's no wonder your pet may become quieter, less active or more grumpy than normal. Remember when you were little, and your hair was scraped back into one of those awful hair scrunchies and then grips pinned in everywhere? That pull, hurt and make your eyes water.... are you feeling my pain? Well our knotty pets are, every time they move! This will often result in your pet's coat being clipped/shaved off or lengthy grooming procedures which can be painful (not to mention more expensive), and highly stressful for the pet. There is a simple way to avoid all of this.

So, before we reach for the 'solves everything hair wax', or, 'spray that detangles a matt thicker than a 4ft plank of wood', this quick hair care guide will keep you and your pet on the right track, with super duper hair of course! Always consult your groomer if you are unsure what the best regime is for your pet, as they do vary from breed to breed.

- Begin handling and grooming procedures from when they are a young puppy to prevent problems in adulthood.
- Our pets require regular hair and nail appointments too! Every 6-8 weeks your dog should have a full professional groom. The exceptions here are Poodles and Bichon Frise: these require a full groom every 4 weeks. All dogs moult, despite myths that say otherwise.
- We don't need to have a water fight with our dogs every day, like we do with our children at bath time (or maybe that's just in my house!) Bathing may be done between

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grooming sessions, but try and limit this to no more than every 3 weeks to prevent skin issues. Dry shampoos and deodorisers can be used as often as required.

- The single most important item you can purchase and then use is a simple metal tooth comb with fairly narrow teeth, ideally with rounded ends so it doesn't scratch. These are able to comb from the root of the hair, where tangles and knots start, to the tip. Brushes are good for grooming the top coat but do little for grooming the 'underneath layer' of the coat. This is one of the most common reasons knots begin.
- Comb their coats every few days.
- Always dry their hair after bathing with a hair dryer and slicker brush, (even if only washing their paws). If their hair is left wet and not combed through, you'll be in knot central before you know it.
- Try not to 'rough dry' their hair with a towel and then leave it. Can you imagine the knotting and frizz if we did this with our hair? The same happens with them. Squeeze dry in the same direction of the hair growth and dry with a hair dryer and slicker brush.
- Use a shampoo suitable for your pet's skin and coat. Do not use human shampoo! Human skin has a pH of 5.5 but pet's skin has pH of 7.3. Human shampoo is therefore too acidic for pets, causing dryness, irritation and inflammation. They do not need a shampoo made from crushed rose petals and vanilla pods, either.

- To help prevent chewing the feet and nails (another one with the nail chewing habit!), keep nails short and the fur in between the pads trimmed.
- Do not be tempted to try and cut knots out, let the professionals do this. Your pet's skin can be cut very easily; not only is it quite thin, but it can be tricky sometimes to find where the knot or matt ends and skin begins.
- Ensure you use a reputable and qualified groomer.

These pointers form the very basics of what grooming is required, although all breeds have their own 'breed standard cut'. Discuss this and your requirements with your groomer — quite often a more practical cut is favourable for all concerned.

The main thing is to choose a style or cut that you are able to cope with at home, one where you don't have to be an award winning stylist, and one that your dog will also tolerate quite happily.

...and yes, there are hair straighteners for dogs!

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