

How-to's for Bathing Your Pet Properly

There is more to bathing a pet than just soap and water! The most important consideration is how your dog or cat responds to a bath and what you can do to make the experience as pleasurable and pain free as possible. Most cats are not fond of water, so it is a good idea to use a slip leash around their necks that you can attach to the faucet of the sink or tub that you are using. I would recommend a nail trimming prior to the bath, as well.

Whether you are bathing a cat or a dog, try to have the water at the right temperature before you begin, and always turn the water on slowly and quietly, allowing the pet to acclimate to the noise and feel of the water. Begin slowly from the tail and work your way up to the neck and head, wetting his or her entire body. Place your hand over your pet's face to prevent and discomfort from water getting into his or her eyes. Sometimes, it is better to use a cup to pour water over the pet; other times, a hose sprayer from the sink or a shower attachment will do the trick, depending on the size of the pet. It is not a bad idea to use a leash to control your dog during a bath, so you don't have a wet dog running around your house.

Choosing a shampoo is the next most important consideration. Not all shampoos are created equal-far from it. What many people do not know is that the skin of dogs and cats is much more sensitive than a person's skin. Pets have hair to protect their skin, but the actual thickness of their skin is significantly less than human skin. For this reason, soaps and detergent shampoos can

strip all the oils from your pet's skin, leaving it dry and flaky. Soap shampoos also can make your pet's hair coat dry and dull. I would recommend consulting with your veterinarian about what kind of shampoo to use. While there are many choices, most of the products you see on the shelves at pet stores, and in the pet aisle at supermarkets and at large retailers are soap-based shampoos (I use the word detergent) that will dry your pet's skin and hair coat.

Most people have their own favorite shampoos and can tell the difference if they use something else. They usually can differentiate between high -and low- priced products, too. I can promise you that the pet shampoos available at most retailers are not using the higher-priced soaps. I tell my clients to use a soap-free shampoo for their pets. I take it one step further by recommending a soap-free shampoo that also is a moisturizing and/or conditioning product. Through the years, I have had many clients tell me that they use no-tears baby shampoo for their pets, because if it is gentle enough for a baby, it must be good for their pets. Once these same clients try the shampoo that I recommend, they are amazed at how much better their pets' hair coats look and feel. That is because it is specially formulated for a pet, not a baby.

Now that you have chosen a shampoo and gotten your pet wet, the next step is to put a little shampoo on your hands and begin rubbing it onto your pet. There is no need to waste a lot of shampoo by squeezing it directly onto the pet. A quarter-sized amount in the palm of your hand is more than enough for a small dog. Start on the lower back of a larger dog and use a second quarter-sized amount if and when you need to. Only a very large dog will need a third drop of shampoo. I must tell you that

soap-free shampoos do not produce a lot of suds, so do not waste product by trying to work up a lather. The important thing is that the shampoo gets worked into the hair and skin. When you get to the neck and top of the head, be very careful around your pet's eyes. Soapy shampoos can cause a chemical burn on the surface of the eye, resulting in a corneal ulcer. These are very painful and expensive to treat. They also can lead to more severe complications in the eye. Soap-free shampoo is not as harmful, but would still cause discomfort, and your pet will not enjoy bath time anymore.

If your pet has a skin condition, your veterinarian can recommend specific, medicated shampoos to help and may even suggest a conditioner to use afterward, since the medicated shampoos are harsher on the skin than a soap-free moisturizing shampoo. Once you have shampooed your pet leave the product on for at least five minutes (longer for medicated shampoos). Then lightly wet the pet, and use your hands to rub the hair and skin again before rinsing completely. There is no need to rinse and repeat. That is just a way to get you to use twice as much product, so you have to buy more shampoo. Because your pets have sensitive skin, it is not recommended that you bathe them more often than once a week. You be the judge of how often you want to shampoo your pets, depending on how dirty they get from playing, if they begin to smell or how their hair coat looks. It is a personal decision between you and your pet!