



Summer Shine

Grooming tips for the hottest months of the year

As you enjoy outdoor fun with your dog this summer, plan for a surge in situations that require a more strategic approach to grooming. We'll look at some of the trickier issues that may arise, and how to handle them.

WATCH THOSE EYES

Some dogs develop eye issues that lead to staining, which is more noticeable on lighter-colored coats.

Allergies remain the most obvious cause, but dogs can also develop dry eyes or inflammation. They can sometimes

suffer corneal ulcerations from bumping their eyes during adventures. Dogs with structural abnormalities to their eyelids also may develop more tear staining.

“Any dog who has chronic or acute ocular discharge should be evaluated by a veterinarian for a more serious underlying ocular condition. Conjunctivitis is a symptom, but it’s not a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes ocular discharge isn’t a serious condition, but it certainly can be an early sign of a more worrisome disease,” says Jaycie Riesberg, a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist in Utah.

She explains that staining comes

from normal bacteria around the eye or iron-containing molecules called porphyrins, which are found in normal saliva, tears, or feces.



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Riesberg says, “Typically, a preservative-free, over-the-counter eye wash can be safely used to clean around the eyes. Ideally, avoid using washcloths as they can be hard to clean, and detergents can be irritating.”

ATTENTION TO EARS

While dogs sometimes get debris in their ears that causes irritation, food or environmental allergies remain the most common reasons for red, inflamed, and painful ears.

Sonja Zabel, a board-certified veterinary dermatologist in Oregon, adds that veterinarians sometimes see new ear issues in dogs diagnosed with hypothyroidism. As metabolism decreases, a dog’s body protects vital functions, leaving the skin vulnerable.

Zabel explains that ear cleaners come in two varieties—some contain a drying agent (helpful for dogs who swim a lot), and others feature ceramide precursors to protect inflamed or damaged skin inside the ear. Her favorites include Virbac EPIOTIC Advanced Ear Cleanser and DOUXO Micellar Solution.

To clean your dog’s ears, Zabel recommends this process:

- Drape a towel around the dog’s neck, especially if cleaning ears indoors.
- Fill the ear canal with ear cleaner.
- Cover the ear canal hole with a cotton ball.
- Gently massage with an upward motion.
- Remove the cotton ball.
- Let the dog shake their head.

“Depending on how much debris you get out of there, you can repeat the process one to three times,” Zabel says. “The last time, you use a cotton ball to clean the outside area. You should never stick anything into the ear canal because it will damage the epithelium (and) create a micro-trauma, which can cause recurrent infections.”

She also warns that ear infections are incredibly painful and often go unrecognized. Especially for dogs with allergies,



it’s important to clean and check the ears regularly and to seek veterinary help right away if you notice redness, discharge, scratching, or head shaking.

PROPER SUN PROTECTION

Sunscreens made for people typically contain one of two categories of ingredients toxic to dogs. Weird as it seems, some contain aspirin derivatives (salicylic acids) that increase bleeding risks and, at higher doses, can affect dogs’ breathing. The other troublesome ingredients show up in mineral-based sunscreens like zinc oxide. Zinc toxicity causes blood cell damage. Typically, though, ingestion of sunscreen

ingredients initially causes vomiting.

Renee Schmid, director of veterinary medicine and a senior veterinary toxicologist for Pet Poison Helpline, explains that the most common sunscreen poisoning scenario is dogs chewing on the bottle and consuming way more than you’d ever apply to their nose, hairless areas along the ears, bald patches, or bellies. Be extra careful, though, with puppies and small-breed dogs because even licking sunscreen off you may be enough to cause toxicity.

“What’s important for pet parents to remember is that dogs and cats, alike, when you apply something to their skin, their hair, coat ... they want to lick it





and groom it off,” Schmid says.

Look for veterinary-formulated sunscreens for animals such as Dermoscent SunFREE. For larger areas needing protection, consider UV-blocking clothes such as Goldpaw’s Sun Shield Tee.

TO AIR-DRY OR NOT?

With summer sun and winds, many feel tempted to let dogs air-dry after baths. Mitch Puerling, a groomer with Grooming @ Golden Paws in Colorado, says, “Personally, I’d prefer to only ever air-dry the really shorthaired breeds, like Boxers, pit bulls, smooth-coated Chihuahuas, and the like. Any dog with more hair than that likely either has enough shed to get out that blow-drying is going to be the best way to remove it, or they have a coat that gets the hair cut, in which case a full blowout is how to achieve an even cut.”

Puerling cautions about wind causing tangles and sun damaging hair follicles if the coat or skin gets overheated in the sun. “In some dogs, this damage may cause the hair to change color or texture,” he says. “If this does happen, it is completely painless for the dog

and eventually reverts to normal as the follicles heal.”

Puerling recommends towel drying while still in the tub, with slow motions that “allow the towel to soak the excess water.” He also suggests wrapping another dry towel around the body and securing it with a clip for 30 minutes to draw out more moisture and speed air-drying time.

For dogs who don’t like their heads dried, he suggests putting a Happy Hoodie over the dog’s head and ears after lightly combing through the wet hairs to separate them for better air



flow—breaking the rule about only brushing fully dry dogs.

Keep in mind that puppies and small-breed dogs struggle more to maintain their body temperature, so don’t leave them wet too long.

INSECT AND PARASITE PROTECTION PITFALLS

Before you race off for more summertime fun, consider these parasite and insect protection mistakes, too.

■ **Topicals:** If you use topical products for external parasite protection, check the packaging for the time required for drying and overall effectiveness before allowing dogs to get wet. That timeline could be a day or two, or even more. If your dog counts among the relentless swimmers or lovers of water, ask about an oral parasite preventive option instead.

■ **Fly bait:** Be extra careful about using fly bait. Schmid warns they often contain organophosphates or carbamates that can be fatal to pets.

■ **Bug sprays:** Be careful where and how you spray topical insect repellants for people. They often feature high concentrations of permethrin, which is particularly dangerous to cats.

■ **Essential oils:** Don’t use concentrated essential oils directly on your dog for parasite protection or to treat skin issues. “Tea tree oil is a big one,” says Schmid. “There are some animal products, like shampoos and things, that have very low concentrations of tea tree oil, but it’s the concentrated form—especially when you put that on an area that’s already kind of damaged skin, it gets absorbed even more readily. You can see body tremors, seizures, and difficulty walking.”

Family fun can get messy, so it’s also a good idea to keep extra dog towels and other quick clean-up supplies in your car or near the doors your dog uses. **FD**

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