

New Cat Survival Guide: Tips for Grooming

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When it comes to grooming, cat parents need to follow a different set of guidelines for bathing, brushing and trimming their pet than their dog-owning counterparts.

This is partly because cats have brush-like tongues that help them do a lot of the work themselves. “Cats are very effective at self-grooming and claw maintenance,” says Dr. Rachel Malamed, **a veterinary behaviorist** based in Los Angeles. “Domestic cats groom themselves for about eight percent of their non-sleeping time.”

However, just because our feline friends are good at keeping themselves tidy doesn't mean that cat parents can ignore their grooming duties. Below, you will find important cat-grooming tips for your new pet.

The Importance of Cat Grooming



“Cat grooming is important because it relieves stress, reduces health issues and increases circulation to help promote healthy skin and coats,” says Jenny Christopherson, cat groomer and owner of Cat Grooming by Jenny in Omaha, Nebraska.

It also acts as a preventative measure to ward off any potential health problems, says Dr. Jennifer Coates, a veterinarian based in Fort Collins, Colorado. Coates says that overgrown nails and matted or dirty fur in cats can lead to skin infections, maggot infestations and more.

Additionally, regular grooming sessions will allow you to build a better relationship with your cat, says Roeann Fulkerson, director of marketing for The International Cat Association. “Making this an enjoyable time to spend between you and your cat will pay off with great rewards,” she says.

Grooming Your Cat at Home: Tips and Advice



At-home cat grooming should include consistent brushing and **regular nail trims**, says Coates, who suggests that pet owners brush their cats once or twice per week and try to get in a nail trim once per month.

Certain cat breeds require more **brushing and coat maintenance** than others, so owners of these breeds should be ready to put in more time. “Breeds such as Persians, Himalayans and Maine Coons need to be brushed daily,” says Christopherson. “They have very thick, dense undercoats that mat easily.”

While healthy adult cats generally keep their coats nicely groomed, pet parents may need to step in and increase coat maintenance if their cats are obese, arthritic or aging. “Many indoor cats are overweight or become arthritic as they age and cannot reach certain areas,” adds Christopherson.

In order to make at-home grooming a stress-free experience, pet parents should try to get their cats used to being handled and familiarize their felines with grooming tools at an early age, says Coates. This will help desensitize your cat the grooming experience.

If you can't get your cat used to grooming as a kitten, it's best to ease into the process and make sure your cat is comfortable at all times. “Whatever their age, start slowly,” says Coates. “Your goal isn't to completely groom your cat in one sitting, but to make the process as pleasurable as possible. Hand out lots of praise and treats whenever your cat cooperates during a grooming session.”

Malamed agrees, adding that you'll want to stop grooming your cat if she displays any signs of discomfort or fear and never to force your cat into an at-home grooming session.

Cat parents should use at-home brushing and grooming as an opportunity to evaluate their cat for any potential skin and coat problems. “If the skin appears scaly, red or irritated, or if the coat appears oily, dull, unkempt or matted then this requires a consultation with your veterinarian or veterinary dermatologist to determine if there is a skin, endocrine or other medical condition,” says Malamed.

Cat Baths: Are They Necessary?



Giving a cat a bath at home is not a good idea, as it can cause unnecessary stress and a dangerous situation for you and your pet. “I don’t generally recommend bathing cats unless there is a health reason, like a skin disease, to do so,” says Coates. “If your veterinarian recommends that you bathe your cat, place a non-skid surface on the bottom of the sink, make sure the water is warm and use a damp cloth around your cat’s face and head.”

To avoid an accident at home, it’s better to leave **cat baths** up to a grooming professional. “Don’t be embarrassed to ask your veterinarian or a professional groomer for help bathing your cat,” says Coates. “Make sure the groomer you choose to work with is comfortable and experienced working with cats.”

Advice for Professional Cat Grooming Appointments



There may come a time that your cat requires the services of a professional cat groomer. Professional cat groomers are skilled at bathing cats, helping to get rid of mats and in cutting a cat's fur to keep your cat comfortable.

Fulkerson recommends seeking out a grooming professional who has specific and specialized experience working with cats. "It's even better if you plan a grooming appointment and select a day when they are not as busy and have fewer dogs in their shop," she says.

A successful cat grooming appointment begins with proper preparation by pet parents says Malamed. "A fear-free visit to the groomer starts at home by first creating a positive association with a carrier, the car ride, and all of the other stimuli that are predictive of such a trip," she says. Exposing your cat to her carrier and car rides prior to the grooming appointment will help things go smoothly the day of. Using pheromone sprays and placing familiar objects in the crate may also help your cat stay calm, she adds.

When visiting a cat groomer for an initial appointment, Christopherson suggests that pet parents hang around the grooming salon for a few minutes after dropping off their felines. “Always ask to stay for a little while when getting your cat groomed for the first time to make sure it is going well,” she says. “This will give you some peace of mind.”

If your cat is fearful of the groomer, it may be necessary to work with a specialized cat or veterinary behaviorist who can help **desensitize or counter-condition** your cat to the triggering aspects of grooming, says Malamed.

In some instances, your veterinarian may recommend medications to sedate your pet during grooming appointments. “Cats who are fearful can be evaluated, and if necessary, anti-anxiety medications can be prescribed by a veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist in combination with a behavior plan to help improve comfort,” adds Malamed.