



Grooming 101

There are groomers all over Hong Kong who can handle the more intense grooming practices, like show dogs and dogs who need shaving or clipping. Daily upkeep at home will help decrease the amount of times you need to bring your pet to the groomers and also make their job easier.

Brushing Hair

Most cats and dogs will tolerate brushing of their fur and bathing with enough training. It is important to make grooming a rewarding experience, brushing should feel good! You can reward them with treats or special cuddles or pats to help them enjoy the experience. For long haired cats and dogs, brushing at least once daily is essential for keeping mats and tangles at bay. You can get a good quality pet brush from any local pet store. Choose one that is not too hard so that it doesn't pull their fur. A good tip, if you think it would feel good using it to brush YOUR hair, you can use it on their hair. Always brush gently and tenderly untangle mats if you can. If you have a poodle, or a poodle mix with hair instead of fur (hair continues to grow and feels a bit wirier), you may want to use a comb instead of a brush. If you have a short haired cat or dog they won't need as much daily brushing, however, if you do brush them daily you can remove the excess hairs which may cut down on your vacuuming due to their shedding.

Brushing Teeth

Most pets will need a dental cleaning under general anesthesia at some point in their lives; however, establishing a good dental care regimen at home will help minimize the number of times this is needed. Brushing your pet's teeth daily will help prevent tartar buildup and damage to the teeth over time. It is important to introduce dental care to your pet as early as possible. If you can start when they are very young, they are more likely to get used to it and tolerate the process. I recommend starting with a very soft, fingertip type brush to brush their teeth once daily. You should use a toothpaste especially formulated for pets - we don't want them swallowing human toothpaste, which has a lot of flouride in it (plus it doesn't taste good, which would make pets less likely to tolerate this). As with every other part of grooming, try to make this as pleasant as possible by giving lots of cuddles while you are brushing their teeth. And remember, safety first! If your pet does not tolerate it, you are at high risk of getting bitten. Don't take that chance! Try and see how they do, but don't push it.



There are treats and bones on the market that promise fresher breath and clean teeth. None of these treats take the place of a good toothbrush and some of them have been known to cause other problems (like getting stuck in their esophagus). If your dog or cat has very bad breath, this could be a sign of more than just dental disease - you should get them checked out by your veterinarian.

Bathing

Baths can be done in your home, or you can bring them to a local pet store. Make sure you have everything you will need first before you put the pet in the tub! The last thing you want is to have to leave to get a towel and you're soaped up pet goes tearing around the flat! You should have the shampoo you are going to use, a container to pour the water over the dog, towel, and brushes. Make sure to remove any collars or harnesses before going in the bath- your dog should be naked. Before you put your pet in the tub or shower, make sure that the water temperature is appropriate – not too hot or too cold (just like you would for a baby). You don't want to spray them with the shower head directly in the face. This will make them hate you and baths.

Start by wetting down your pet (cat or dog) – but honestly, this is mostly dogs. I have a scar on my hand from where I decided it would be a good idea to bathe my childhood cat (It wasn't). Apply the soap as directed. If you are using a medicated shampoo, they may recommend that it sits on your pet for 10-15 minutes (depending on the shampoo). I usually sud them up really well over their body but use my hand to just gently clean around the face and eyes – we don't want soap getting into their eyes! If you don't have access to dog specific shampoo, you can use baby shampoo – I like Johnson and Johnson no more tears. Try to focus on the areas that get the dirtiest, like the legs and under the belly. Once the shampoo has sat for the length of time required, make sure to completely rinse the shampoo – this usually takes a few tries to get the shampoo completely gone.

Don't forget the chest and under the belly. Be prepared, you will think that the dog is completely rinsed, and that it will sit there calmly waiting to be lifted out. They will shake themselves off – it is what dogs do. Try to prevent that water and soap from going everywhere by immediately grabbing a towel to rub them dry and to cover them when they shake. Gently rub them down, get them as dry as possible. If you have a long haired dog or a very tiny dog that is prone to getting cold, you can use a hair dryer to dry them off – but use at a low setting, set at least 5 inches from their body, and keep it moving. Please do not burn the dog. Do not allow them outside until they are completely dry. If there is freshly mowed grass, they will come back green.



You don't have to bathe cats; they're pretty clean creatures! How often you bathe a dog depends on the dog. For dogs with skin issues, best to bath them usually once weekly. Bathe dogs when they are dirty. Bathing them too much will dry out their skin – if they are doing well otherwise, a bath once a month is fine.

Expressing the Anal Sacs

If you are comfortable doing so, you can try expressing the anal sacs of your dog while bathing. Truthfully, I usually only recommend that you do this if you have been told by your vet it is necessary. In order to express anal sacs, you put your hands on either side of the anus (the butthole), and squeeze. You should not be doing internal expression of anal sacs unless you are trained to do so (and very few dogs sit still for anal sac expression).

Nail Cutting

Nail trims are some of the most dreaded tasks for pet owners and caretakers. If you want to leave them for a groomer or your vet, that is very understandable and okay. However, if you want to tackle this task at home, here are some helpful tricks and hints. First, choose the appropriate tools. For cats, I prefer the small scissors-like nail trimmers. These work well for small dogs as well. For medium size and large dogs, I will use the larger version of these. Some people prefer the guillotine type, where you have to stick the nail through the hole and then push upwards – I find that with my pets it's a struggle to do that successfully. If you have a dog with a clear nail, or a cat, it is easy to see where the "quick" is (the blood supply to the nail). Simply position your nail clippers away from the "quick" and cut that way. If you have a dog with black nails, where you can't see the "quick", it gets much harder. My trick is to never cut the nail shorter than the pad – if you do that, you are less likely to get the "quick". You can also try positioning the nail trimmers and then squeezing slightly – if the dog jolts a bit, you probably should reposition the trimmers. It should never your goal to "quick" a dog – it is uncomfortable and will bleed.

Apply a tissue or gauze to the nail to help stop bleeding. Most pet stores sell a product called "quick stop" – you can use that to stop the bleeding, or a styptic pencil. The easiest (and most available) thing to use is cornstarch or flour – simply stick the nail into the cornstarch or flour, to help stop the bleeding, and let it sit there. That helps the blood clot. These do tend to bleed – if it is bleeding quite a lot, you can place a small bandage around the foot and bring to your local veterinarian (most of the time it will have stopped bleeding before you get there).



If you want to avoid nail trimming entirely, you can use a ‘dremel’ – this is a tool that acts like a “quick” moving emery board – it’s what they use during human pedicures. You can find them online. This simply grinds down the nail, so there is no bleeding to worry about it. They can be loud, so make sure your dog will tolerate the sound before using them. Again, make this a positive experience by offering them treats. You may have seen the viral video where some lady puts saran wrap on her head and then coats it with peanut butter so that the dog licks the peanut butter off while she is trimming the nails. Don’t do this. It’s a great way to get bitten. You can put peanut butter or cream cheese on a steady surface (such as the wall) and allow the dog to lick it off as a distraction, but please don’t use your head this way. If you are worried about your pet biting, a muzzle is always recommended.