



Going Beyond the Coat

Caring for a pet's ears, eyes and nails are important elements of a high-quality groom and require careful attention to detail to ensure overall health.

BY CHRIS PAWLOSKY

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In my grooming salon, ears are always on the minds of the groomers. That's because this part of every single dog that walks in the door requires a lot of attention.

The inside of the ear canal is a continuation of the skin. The only difference is there are additional sebaceous glands, and the apocrine glands are deeper in the dermis. Normal ear wax is a mix of both glandular fluids.

The skin grows from the inside out, and it takes approximately six weeks for the cells to develop from bottom layer to top layer under normal conditions. However, any stimulus—either physical or chemical—can cause an abnormal overproduction of skin cells. When this happens inside the dog's ear canal, the extra skin cells have nowhere to go. Think of it like scaly skin that sits in the bottom of the long L-shaped ear canal. How will this debris be removed?

In a healthy ear with normal cellular production, a good balance is maintained. Normal amounts of skin cells are shed and are removed by normal amounts of the skin

flora—the microorganisms that live on the skin surface. However, when we pluck hair from the ear, we may cause a reaction.

If we are gentle and pluck small amounts of hair at a time, there may not be enough of a reaction to stimulate the overproduction of skin cells. But if we pluck too much hair at one time and create an ulceration, this will initiate the production of an abnormal number of cells to heal what the body thinks is a wound. These cells will then be pushed to the skin's surface, where they will die and build up, so assistance will be needed to remove them.

In order to help the skin flora manage these extra cells and prevent an imbalance, the ear needs to be flushed routinely during the healing process. Otherwise, there will be an overproduction of bacteria and yeast, which feeds on the extra cells and causes complete chaos. With this in mind, think before you remove large amounts of hair from the ear canal at one time—you may be causing an injury to the inside of the ears skin.

There are warning signs to look for before working on a dog's ears, all of which warrant an urgent veterinarian visit—for example, if the ear is painful and the dog resists the cleaning. Do not pluck or clean ears if you see a pet tilting its head, as this could be a sign of a ruptured eardrum. Likewise, avoid working on ears that have a smelly discharge coming from them, as this could be a sign of infection. A vet may need to swab the ear to culture the organisms, and prior cleaning could interfere with the results.

Once it's established that you are working on healthy ears, there are a lot of things to consider when plucking the hair. For example, how much hair is in the ear canal? If you have a regular four to six-week customer with a small amount of coat in the ear canal, you probably will not have any issues with plucking. However, if you have an ear that has never been plucked before or is double-feathered, things may be more complicated.

The bottom line is if you are going to stimulate the skin's surface by removing a lot of hair, you need to educate the customer. When I take on a new client, I like to examine the ears so I can educate them on any existing issues. I explain the ear cleaning process is a catch-22. If I do not pluck and clean the dogs' ears, they will get limited air in the lower part of the canal. The hair in the canal can also hold moisture, and many bad bacteria are more prolific in a dark, moist environment that gets little oxygen. All of these things can cause an imbalance in the ear flora.

Healthy dogs and cats seem to manage their own ear health with few issues, but problems can be caused by a variety of things, including parasites, food allergies, product reactions, foreign objects in the ear, accumulation of hair, dead skin buildup, autoimmune diseases and improper drying after swimming or bathing.

The best way to remove the buildup of debris and flaky skin is flush the ear. It is the only way to truly reach the bottom of the canal. A slightly acid cleaner works well in managing bacteria. I personally like Zymox, Hydro Surge ear cleaner and Davis boric acid flush. Before flushing, though, remember to ask the owner if the pet has exhibited any sign of eardrum damage. If so, do not flush!

CLEANING THE EARS

After gently plucking the ears, put the dog into the tub and flush and pack the ear canals. Once the dog has been lathered the first time, place a fair amount of ear cleaning solution in the canals again and massage the base of the ears. Let the dog shake its head, as this will



ZYMOX (zymox.com) Ear Solutions for problematic ears are enzyme-based products that are vet recommended, work without antibiotics and are very easy to use. The ZYMOX Ear Cleanser provides gentle cleaning plant surfactants to clean away irritants and keep ears fresh.



Deep Cleaning Paw Fizz Tablets from Warren London (warrenlondon.com) only take a three to five minute soak to clean paws and nails. They help stop paw licking with White Tea Tree Oil that fights fungus, yeast and bacteria. The Seaweed Extract is also great for conditioning and brightening the nails.



Davis Manufacturing (davisvmfg.com) offers a line of mild yet effective ear care products to help create and maintain healthier ear environments. The popular EarMed Boracetic Flush addresses ear conditions associated with bacteria, yeast and fungi. It contains boric and acetic acid to help provide relief for pets experiencing ear inflammation, discharge, pruritis and head shaking.

help loosen debris and force it to the outer ear. Then take a cotton ball and gently wipe the outer ear canal. Do not wipe any further than where you can easily see in the canal. Otherwise, you may push the debris further down, causing issues. Repeat this process a few times until the outer ear and canal is clean.

Next, pack the ear with cotton and lather the entire outer ear with shampoo. Then rinse. If the ear is squeaky clean inside and out, I will still rinse a few extra times. Sometimes, I even soak the ears in a small bucket to make sure they are rinsed well. Following the bath, pull the cotton and add a few more drops of cleaner. Then place a dry cotton ball back in the ear so the noise of the high-velocity drier does not scare the dog or cause ear damage.

FIGHTING TEAR STAINS

When working with a dog, you might notice a lot of dark, wet staining around the eyes too. The problem is most common in breeds with long hairs on the face. Although tear stains are not an issue for the dog, they can be symptomatic of other problems, such as an ear infection, ingrown eyelashes, dental problems, corneal ulcerations, a pH imbalance, poor diet, unusually large tear glands or unusually small tear gland openings, stress, or even the use of plastic food or water bowls, which encourage bacteria growth.

The rusty color is often due to porphyrin, a waste byproduct resulting from the breakdown of red blood cells. The stains darken when exposed to sunlight; so no,

you're not imagining things when you think the stains look worse outdoors. However, stains that are more brownish than red—and that smell bad—could indicate a yeast infection. It's a good idea to recommend that clients talk with their vet about possible causes of tear staining in their pets.

It's also important to keep the hairs around the eyes trimmed, as well as keeping the corners of the eyes clean with warm water.

Tear stains can be safely treated with a variety of safe products like Angels' Eyes, which address the problem from the inside out. Other products will not only remove tear stains from the surface but also clean between skin folds on wrinkled breeds like Bulldogs and Shar-Peis. However, before using any tear stain products, clients should discuss the problem with their veterinarian to check for an underlying, treatable cause like an infection or blockage. This is especially important if the tear stains appear suddenly on a breed not prone to the condition.

NAIL CARE DONE RIGHT

To polish things off, we take the time to file or grind toe nails. There are different reasons for grinding a nail. First, many dogs hate the pressure placed on the nail by guillotine and pliers-type nail cutters. Another reason to use a grinder is that dogs' nails are often left jagged after trimming, and a nail grinder will smooth them efficiently. With these factors in mind, grinding can make a great add on service for your shop, so make sure you charge for your time.

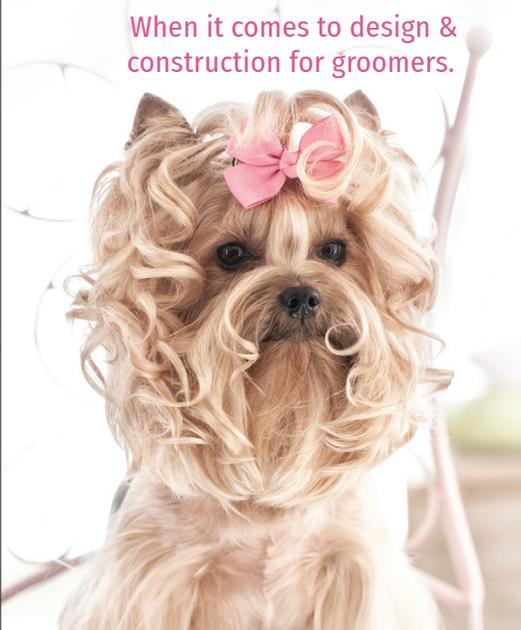
When working on nails, I normally hold the dogs coat back and work from the underside of the nail, up. This creates a nice straight surface. Many people prefer their pets' nail rounded, and that works too.

Remember the nails are softened when wet. For the smoothest finish, grind nails after the bath. For your safety, it does not hurt to wear breathing and eye protection. **PB**

Chris Pawlosky is a Certified Master Groomer, professional handler, breeder, grooming show judge and successful pet store and grooming shop owner (The Pet Connection) since . For years, she served as national training manager for Oster Professional Products, where she developed new initiative educational material to educate at schools and conventions all over the world. Pawlosky is currently working with Judy Hudson to produce the Grooming Professors—a service through which the two industry veterans share their many years of grooming, competing, dog show conditioning and handling with groomers across the country via Facebook and through an interactive website where visitors can access webcasts and videos about everything grooming-related.

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