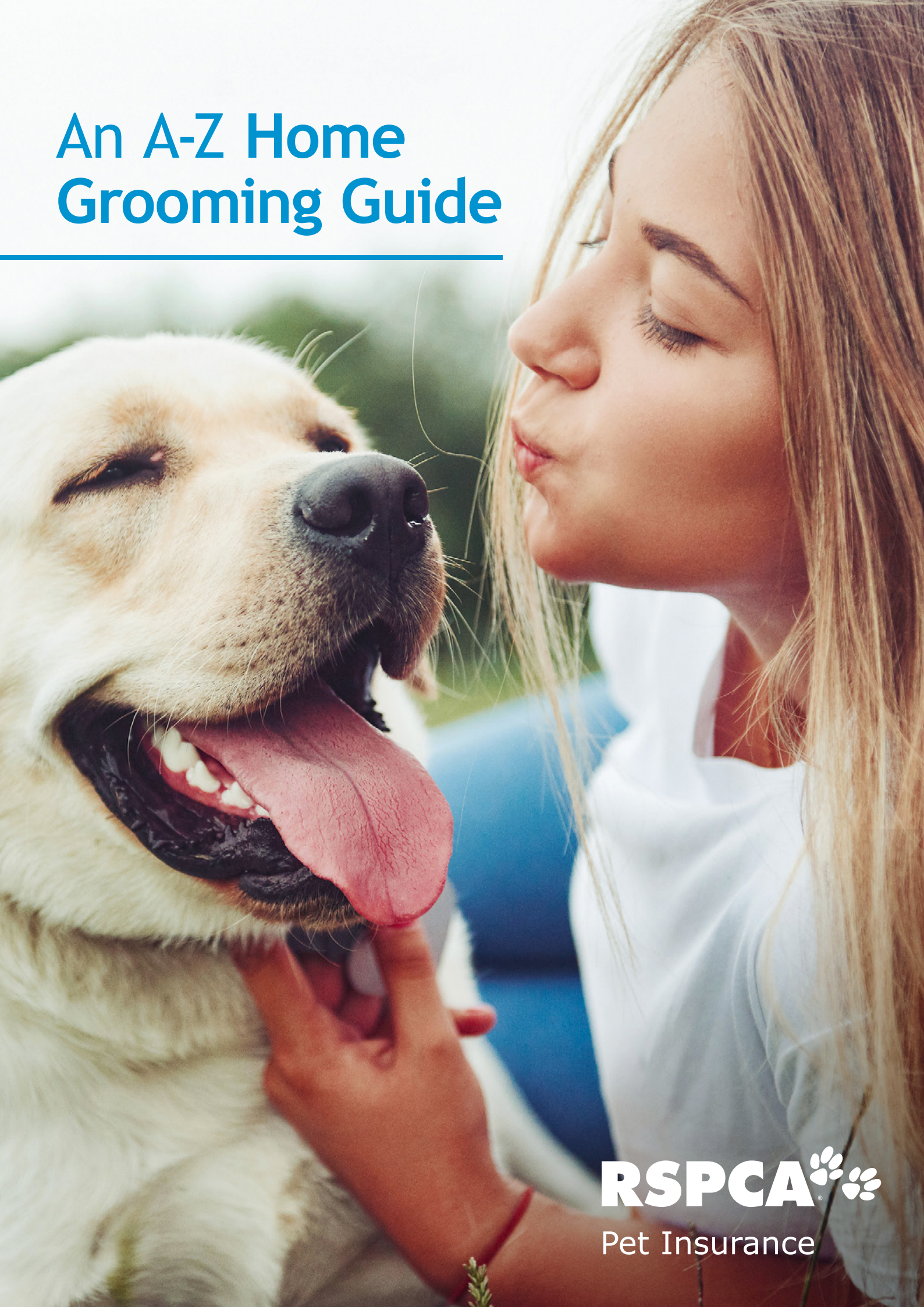


# An A-Z Home Grooming Guide

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# Dr Rosemary Elliott

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Rosemary studied veterinary science at the University of Sydney after establishing her career as a clinical psychologist. Her experiences during veterinary training fostered an ambition to focus directly on animal welfare and ethics. Rosemary now combines her psychology background and veterinary skills to contribute to and promote animal welfare through writing, research and presentations. She is the current President of Sentient, an independent veterinary association dedicated to animal welfare advocacy. Her particular interests are animal sentience and the human-animal bond.



# Introduction

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One of the most common questions pet owners ask is how to groom their pets at home and what this involves. This is encouraging, [because pet grooming is essential](#) for keeping our cats and dogs healthy and comfortable. It's also a great way to bond with our furry friends and gives us the opportunity to check them over to spot any signs that suggest they need medical attention. To get started, read our A to Z home grooming guide, which covers many aspects of grooming including brushing, washing, fur clipping and nail trimming, and speak to your veterinarian if you have any further questions.





# A-Z Guide



## Anxiety

Being massaged, taking a bath or getting a haircut can be relaxing for humans, but pets vary in how much they enjoy or tolerate grooming. Anxiety during grooming can often be prevented by effective and early positive reward-based training, but you may wonder how to manage a cat or dog who is already anxious? The key to reducing their anxiety is to start as you would with a kitten or puppy by taking things slowly and offering rewards such as treats for calm behaviour. And remember to remain calm yourself! Cats find bathing stressful and should only be bathed if your veterinarian advises this to treat a skin condition.

If your cat shows any sign of becoming distressed when being brushed, either apply less pressure or stop the session until next time. [Cat grooming should never involve restraint](#). It's also important when [grooming your cat to start when they are feeling relaxed](#) and happy and to end with treats and praise.

One of the most common dog grooming questions is [how to soothe your dog's anxiety during grooming?](#) If your dog appears stressed, take a step back and teach them to feel comfortable being handled, especially in sensitive areas such as the tail area and paws, using treats as rewards. You can then gradually introduce brushing and bathing. Never use forceful handling as this can create a negative association with grooming and also risks injury to yourself or your dog if they attempt to escape or bite. If you are unable to groom your cat or dog due to their anxiety, see your veterinarian for advice about training and to discuss whether a professional groomer or grooming at the veterinary clinic is the best option.

## Brushing

All cats and dogs should be brushed to remove loose fur, dirt and debris, keep their coats healthy and prevent matting. How often you need to brush your pet depends on their fur length, coat type and recent activities. As a rule, short-haired pets should be brushed at least weekly, but medium and long-haired pets require daily brushing to keep them comfortable and to reduce shedding, particularly if they have thick undercoats.

When grooming your cat, [start by using your fingers to massage their skin against the direction of hair growth](#) to remove dead hairs and then use a flea comb to check for flea dirt. Long-haired cats will also need a wide toothed comb to help remove dead hair, particularly from areas prone

to matting such as under the armpits. End by brushing from head to tail using gentle strokes with a brush or grooming pad.

[To brush your dog](#), gently brush in the direction of hair growth using a brush suited to your dog's coat and a comb or slicker brush as needed to prevent tangles. [Apply lighter pressure or change to a different type of brush](#) for grooming your dog if he or she seems uncomfortable.

## Clipping

Clipping the coats of dogs is often associated with fancy hairstyles for breeds such as Poodles, but the main reason for clipping is to remove tight matts, prevent heat stress in hot weather or remove fur from non-shedding dogs. It also helps owners to search their pet effectively for ticks. Clipping requires a high level of skill in using electric clippers safely and can be stressful for pets. The safest approach to avoid accidents is to [have this type of pet grooming performed by a](#)



[professional groomer \(ask your veterinarian for a recommendation\) or through your veterinary clinic](#) (especially for pets who need sedation).

## Dental care

An important part of grooming that is often overlooked is to [take care of your cat or dog's teeth](#) to prevent painful and potentially serious dental and periodontal (gum) disease. The best recommendation is daily brushing using a pet toothbrush and toothpaste, starting from when your pet is young. Your veterinarian can advise you about dental diets and other ways to keep your pet's mouth clean, including an annual dental check at the clinic.

## Eyes and ears

When grooming your cat or dog, check their eyes for any discharge, redness or squinting and also check their ears for discharge or bad smell. Behavioural signs of poor eye or ear health can include rubbing or head shaking. Consult your veterinarian immediately if you notice these or any other abnormalities. Eye or ear cleaning should only be performed under veterinary advice. Some dogs with white colouring, such as Bichon Frises and Maltese, develop red stains under their eyes. [It's important to have this assessed by your veterinarian](#) because there is usually a medical cause that needs to be treated, such as blocked tear ducts or eyelid abnormalities.

## Fur trimming

[Some dogs need regular trimming](#) in particular areas where the fur obscures their sight or irritates them (e.g. around the eyes, anus or ears), where it traps food or creates infection in skin folds (around the chin and lower jaw) or in any area prone to matting or collecting debris. Trimming fur is best performed by a professional groomer. If you wish to do this at home, consult your veterinarian for advice about how to use blunt-nosed safety scissors.



## Grooming equipment

To set yourself up for home grooming, seek advice from your veterinarian about the right equipment for your cat or dog. [To groom your cat you will need a comb](#) (fine-toothed for short-haired cats and wide-toothed for medium to long-haired cats), a soft brush and grooming mittens for short haired cats and longer bristle brushes for medium to long-haired cats as well as a wire slicker brush or undercoat rake to remove dead hairs and reduce shedding.

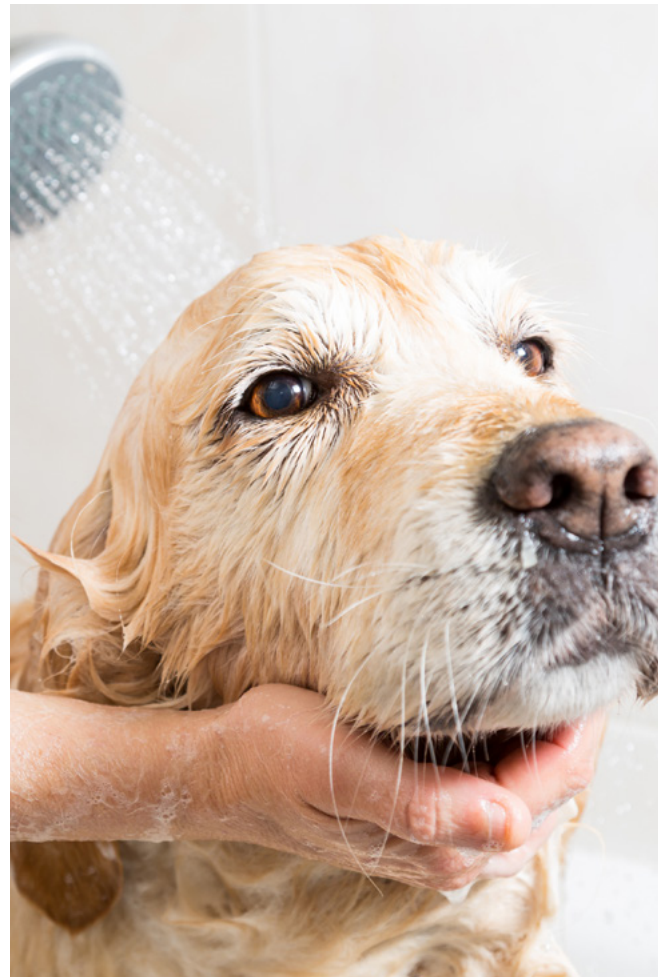
Likewise for dogs, grooming equipment needs to match your pet's coat type. Short-bristle brushes or soft-bristle grooming mittens are suitable for short-haired dogs but [longer haired dogs need brushes with longer bristles](#). You will also need a fine-tooth comb to remove dirt, and [for longer haired dogs, a wide-tooth comb and wire slicker brush](#) for detangling and removing loose hairs. For bathing your dog, use a mild hypoallergenic shampoo especially formulated for dogs. Your veterinarian will advise you if your dog requires a medicated shampoo for any skin condition. Other supplies for bathing include absorbent towels, plastic tub, attachment hose and sprayer for the tap, a non-slip bathmat and buckets for outside bathing. If you are confident with home trimming and nail clipping you will also need a pair of blunt safety scissors and pet nail clippers. And don't forget the toothbrush or thimble and pet toothpaste for your cat or dog!

## Hair drying

Your dog needs to be properly dried after a bath to prevent matting or trapped moisture against their skin. Start by towel drying their head and face, with gentle attention to their ears, and then towel dry them all over. Hair dryers are not necessary and are best avoided as dogs can find them stressful and can become overheated. [If you do use a hair dryer, keep this on a low heat setting](#), avoid your dog's head and face and keep moving the dryer quickly in a back and forth motion at a distance from your dog without focusing on one area.

## Indoor or outdoor bathing

Indoor bathing is suitable for smaller dogs that you can easily lift into a bath tub (or a plastic dog tub placed in your bath) but be sure to supervise them at all times, use low water levels and have a non-slip bath mat handy for when they get out. Medium or large sized dogs and dogs who attempt to escape the bath tub are best bathed in the yard with buckets of warm water. Using a hose on a dog is generally unpleasant unless the weather is very hot and may put them off having a bath again. Wherever you bathe your dog, [test the water temperature for comfort and use low water pressure](#).



## Joy!

Pets who become used to being brushed from an early age learn to associate it with treats, praise, massage and being touched in areas that feel good, such as the front of the chest. Brushing can be enjoyable for



both you and your pet, and this can even include bath time for dogs. [An extra benefit of grooming is to teach dogs to sit still](#), which makes trips to the veterinarian much easier.

## Kooky colours

With the social media craze in recent years for dyeing pets' fur in kooky colours and patterns, you may wonder how to do this with your cat or dog. It's important to know that some products you can buy are actually bad for your pet and fur dye is one of them. Products designed for humans are dangerous for pets, as there is no guarantee that products labelled 'natural' or 'pet friendly' will not cause irritation and there have been confirmed cases of toxic reactions in both cats and dogs.

Fur dyeing is available at some pet grooming salons where the products used are reported to be safe for use on pets but there is no benefit to your pets in being dyed. Also, the lengthy procedure involved, which includes the application of foils, may cause them to feel stressed and confused.

## Lumps and bumps

Regular brushing of your pet is a great way to become familiar with their usual appearance and to notice any changes that need examination. By running your fingers through their fur, you can detect any unusual lumps or bumps, or any changes in their size, shape or colour. [There are common causes of lumps and bumps in dogs and cats](#) but there is no way to tell whether these are harmless or a sign of something more serious, so have them assessed by your veterinarian. Even seemingly [harmless lumps](#) such as warts may need to be removed, and, if the lump is malignant, early detection gives your pet the best chance of successful treatment.

## Matts

One of the aims of regular grooming is to prevent fur matts, but these can easily develop in the coats of pets with longer fur. Mats can trap moisture and lead to skin infections and discomfort so they must be removed. [You may be able to tease them out gently with your fingers or trim them off with safety scissors](#), but severe matting that is close to the skin must be removed with clippers, so see your veterinarian, who may need to sedate or anaesthetise your pet for this procedure.

## Nail clipping

[Clipping your pet's claws is an important part of grooming for dogs](#), because unless they wear their nails down naturally through exercising on hard surfaces, the nails can split and cause pain and injury. The dew claws on the sides of the front feet always need regular trimming. Cats who spend most of their time indoors or who are inactive for any reason, such as reduced activity due to age or arthritis, may also need their nails clipped. Ask your veterinarian to show you how to clip your pet's nails and to help you identify when this is needed.

This should be done regularly, such as every one to two months. As a general guide, if you hear your dog's nails clicking



as they walk, it's time for a trim! Training your pet to tolerate nail clipping starts

with getting them used to having their feet handled. If you don't feel confident clipping your pet's nails, or if your pet is anxious and jumpy about the procedure, it's best to have this done by a professional groomer or at your local veterinary clinic.



## Out of home grooming

Handling and brushing pets regularly is something all owners can learn to do with confidence and this can be very bonding. There are many reasons why you may prefer to use professional groomers for other aspects of grooming, such as bathing, nail clipping and fur clipping or trimming. It may be as simple as not having enough time, or perhaps your pet is quite anxious about the procedure

and difficult to handle. Many pets are more easily managed by a professional in these situations. Choose a recommended professional groomer who uses gentle handling and rewards to help your pet feel comfortable.

You may also lack confidence in your own skill level and be concerned about injuring your pet, which can be a realistic fear when using equipment such as electric clippers. This is where professional groomers come in handy, and many of them have mobile services that can attend your home. Your veterinarian can advise you about whether the best option for your pet is a professional groomer or whether their grooming should be performed at the veterinary clinic.

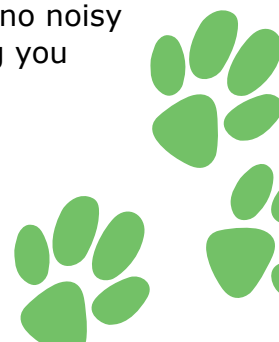
## Parasites

All cats and dogs should be given flea and tick prevention, but checking your pet's coat daily is still important. Pets with fleas don't always scratch themselves in your presence but fleas leave droppings (known as 'flea dirt'). Use a flea comb to search for these tiny dark specks, which will turn red if placed on a wet tissue. [Adult fleas are dark brown and easy to spot](#) as they move through your pet's fur and skin.

[Paralysis ticks can be identified](#) by running your fingers through your pet's fur, including the face, neck and ears, to check for small lumps. Paralysis ticks are 3mm to 10mm in size and appear bluish to light grey in colour when engorged with blood. Make sure you are familiar with what they look like and, if you find a tick on your pet, [remove it immediately by its head](#) and take your pet to the veterinarian for urgent treatment.

## Quiet time

To make grooming sessions enjoyable for you and your pet, find a quiet time of day when you are both relaxed, have no noisy interruptions and have everything you need on hand.





## Routine

Setting up a routine that works for your family is the way to be sure you provide your cat or dog with the grooming they need. Although not all cats and dogs need daily brushing, setting aside a daily time gives you the chance to check their general health and spend special time with them. It's also useful to develop a routine checklist for other grooming tasks and placing this somewhere obvious as a reminder.

## Safety in the house

If your cat or dog is being treated for any skin condition or allergy, [ask your veterinarian how this will affect their grooming needs](#). For example, you may be advised to wash them with a medicated shampoo and conditioner or to wash them more frequently or not at all to avoid drying out their skin. The routine of daily coat checking will also help you identify signs that your pet may have a skin disease that needs veterinary attention. [Skin conditions in cats and dogs are common](#) so if you see anything that looks abnormal, particularly if accompanied by behaviours such as itching or excessive scratching, see your veterinarian.

## Training

The best way to make grooming a positive experience for your cat or dog is to train them using positive reward based methods, preferably starting when they are puppies and kittens. Get them used to being handled by patting and stroking them on the chest and back, gradually moving towards more sensitive areas such as the stomach, then handling their legs and paws. Keep the sessions brief and positive, using treats and praise as rewards.

Then you can introduce brushing, starting with general strokes. [The same principles apply to all aspects of grooming](#). Remember never to use restraint and to be alert to signs your pet is feeling uncomfortable or stressed. And you're not alone - the veterinarians and veterinary



nurses at your local veterinary clinic will be happy to advise and may refer you to puppy pre-school or a professional trainer.

## Undercoats

Cats and dogs need extra attention to their undercoats when being groomed and this is particularly the case for those with thick undercoats (such as Persians and Samoyeds). This means daily brushing using a wire slicker brush or undercoat rake to remove dead hairs, which would otherwise lead to matting and excess shedding during the warmer months. This also helps prevent the development of hairballs in cats.

## Veterinary assistance

Make sure you take your cat or dog for regular veterinary checks (at least annually). Your veterinarian is the best source of advice about preventative health

care such as grooming because they can tailor this to your pet's particular needs. They can also teach you how to safely perform grooming tasks or provide these services at the clinic as required.

## Washing

Cats should not be bathed unless advised by your veterinarian, but dogs should be bathed as needed. You may wonder [how often you should wash your dog](#). The best approach is to limit baths to when they are dirty, smelly or need to be bathed to manage a skin problem. Washing your dog too frequently can dry out their skin,



especially if they have a pre-existing condition. [When giving your dog a bath](#), always use warm water, massage in a specially formulated and mild dog shampoo (or a medicated shampoo if advised by your veterinarian) and rinse and dry thoroughly.

## Xmas (Christmas)

During the Christmas season it can be fun to take grooming a step further and dress up your pet in festive outfits. It's important to consider how your pet will experience this, [so follow a few guidelines to make sure they are safe and comfortable](#). Always supervise your pet when they are wearing a costume and only allow them to wear this for a short period. Avoid anything that restricts their movement or vision, that could cause them to overheat or that has pieces of fabric they could ingest. The safest options are festive bandanas, small reindeer antlers or Santa hats, as long as your pet feels comfortable.

## Your pet's safety

When grooming your pet at home, you are responsible for their safety. To prevent accidents, the first advice is to know your limits. If you are not experienced at clipping or trimming fur or cutting nails, leave this to a professional. Never leave your pet unattended in the bath or on a high table which they could jump or fall from but don't use any form of restraint other than keeping a hand on them at all times.

It may be safer to bathe large dogs with someone else to assist. If your pet is anxious about grooming and difficult to handle, never force the issue. Instead, seek help to train them to gradually accept being handled and in the meantime use a professional groomer or your veterinarian. And [avoid common bath time mistakes](#) such as the wrong water temperature, harsh spray, using human shampoo, not drying your pet properly or using a hairdryer and burning their skin.



## Zoonoses

Zoonoses are diseases that we can catch from animals. There is a low risk that if your pet has such a disease you may be affected. To protect yourself, seek your veterinarian's advice about how to stay safe while grooming any pet with a zoonotic disease such as ringworm, some intestinal worms, mites and fleas. To reduce this risk, take your pet to the veterinarian regularly to help keep them healthy and keep your pet's parasite prevention up to date.

## ABC - Confidence is Key

Pet grooming promotes the health and wellbeing of cats and dogs and home grooming is a great way to give them our attention and a full body check. It's important to make sure you feel confident about grooming your pet safely, so remember that professional services are often the best option for some procedures. If you notice anything unusual about your pet's physical condition, or if your pet experiences a grooming-related injury, see your veterinarian. [You can also help prepare yourself and help your back pocket against potentially huge eligible vet bills for specified accidental injuries and illnesses with a pet insurance policy.](#)

