

Why Groom?

Is there anything cuter than a puppy? Yes. A clean puppy!

Virginia Parker Guidry

You might be wondering why it's important to groom your puppy. According to veterinary dermatologist and author Lowell Ackerman, DVM, Dipl. ACVD, grooming your puppy is important for three reasons. "First, grooming removes dead hair and skin cells; stimulates the deposit of natural oils through the coat; and prevents tangles, mats and knots," Ackerman says. "These are the main cosmetic reasons that we groom ourselves, as well.

"The second reason is that grooming provides a natural surveillance system for locating fleas, ticks, foreign objects (e.g., burrs and foxtails) and masses, and allows them to be removed, or receive veterinary attention," Ackerman adds.

"The third important reason, one not to be underestimated, is that it's an important bonding exercise with a pup, and helps establish the behavioral hierarchy within the household. Not only that, but a pup that has a nice coat because of regular grooming is going to be held more, petted more, and generally receive more affection than a pup that doesn't look, feel or smell as good. Bonding is the most important thing that can happen between a pup and its family, so this is important for everyone," Ackerman says.

A groomed puppy is a healthier puppy. A dirty, matted coat creates a hospitable environment for bacteria, yeast, fleas and ticks. "In severe situations, sores can form under and around matted fur, and during the warmer months, flies can deposit eggs in the damaged tissue, leading to the development of maggots in the wound," Ackerman says. "Ticks, especially, can spread a number of dangerous diseases. Because ticks need to be embedded for 24 to 72 hours before passing on a disease, routine inspection and grooming provides a window of opportunity for tick removal."

Too often, grooming is overlooked as an important part of a pup's health care, says Shawn Messonnier, DVM,. Messonnier believes this so strongly that he included a chapter titled, "Healthy Grooming" in his book, *8 Weeks to a Healthy Dog* (Rodale, 2003). Messonnier stresses that grooming is as important as providing a healthy diet, treating disease and regular veterinary visits in a puppy's overall health plan.

Next Step: Brushing Basics