

Cleaning a Dirty Dog

The right shampoo and conditioner won't dry out a dog who needs to be bathed frequently.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a small, longhaired puppy who gets so dirty outside I have to give her a bath almost every other day. If I use a high-quality shampoo, do I need to use a conditioner as well? What about pet wipes? Can they harm her tender skin? Is a whitening shampoo too harsh?

A. By a "high-quality" shampoo, I am assuming you mean one that will not strip her coat of its essential oils and dry out her skin. If you do use such a shampoo – preferably a hypoallergenic product that is free of soap, detergent, fragrance, and color additives – rinse thoroughly, and your dirty little devil is a healthy, well-nourished pet, you can safely bathe her as often as needed. Usually these "hypo" shampoos use saponins (plant derivatives) instead of soap or detergent to get the dog clean. If you find one that contains aloe vera or another moisturizing agent such as coconut oil, jojoba, avocado, lanolin, or panthenol, all the better. In the salon, we use this kind of shampoo for young puppies and ultra-sensitive pets who may be suffering from allergies to something in their environment, a prior flea infestation, or food.

As for whitening shampoos, I would use them only occasionally if you are frequently bathing your dog. Some contain bleaching agents and are popular with fanciers who breed and show white-coated dogs like the Maltese, Bichon Frise, American Eskimo Dog, and West Highland White Terrier. Then there are enzymatic whitening shampoos, which use enzymes to break down the stains that are then removed from the coat by the shampoo's surfactants, the cleansing agents that wash these particles away.

Bluing shampoos have long been a trick of the trade for show dog folks. Your grandma may have used a blue rinse to keep the yellow in her silver locks. If she left it on too long, she may have ended up with blue hair because white hair, whether on dogs or people, is notoriously porous and soaks up coloring like crazy. Some of today's most effective whitening shampoos for pets use a little of this bluing plus optical brighteners that actually give the coat reflective properties.

No matter which shampoo you use, always follow it up by conditioning her coat. This will seal up the hair shaft cuticle and keep the coat and skin from becoming dried out. Longhaired dogs like yours benefit from a moisturizing cream rinse to add body and prevent breakage. In the salon, we dilute this 8 to 1; if used full-strength, it can leave the coat greasy. Hair shafts that are not conditioned after the bath are more porous and far more likely to pick up dirt and stains so you may find your little puddle-jumper stays cleaner longer if you condition her after each bath.

Your dog's diet also has a major effect on her coat's condition. It should contain both omega-6 fatty acids, derived from vegetables and plants, and omega-3 acids, derived from fish oils. Vitamin B will also improve the dog's skin, building up a natural barrier to irritants, bacteria, and other substances that make life more challenging for a dirty dog and the family that has to care for it.

Regarding pet wipes, I don't think they would bother her as long as you don't use them in her eyes. They are effective only topically, most useful for "spot" cleaning, such as dirty feet, poop on her fanny, or food residue left over after she chows down.