

Coping With a Dog Who Sheds

Limit your dog's shedding problem with the right tools and technique.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a Pug who sheds really badly. Is there something I can do to limit or stop the shedding? I comb him, but it doesn't help much.

A. Pugs are among the most endearing of small dog breeds. One look at their tragic-comic faces will chase your blues away. But there's no doubt about it – these little characters are true shedding machines. Besides their horror at having their nails trimmed, I think it's their only fault.

Yes, there are some things you can do to limit the shedding but no, you can't stop it completely. I applaud you for trying to groom your Pug, but the comb is not the right tool for this short-haired double-coated breed. Until recently, I mainly advocated a rubber curry brush but I have added a new tool to my arsenal for pets like yours – the FURminator. It comes in several sizes; the small one would work best on your little guy. Use it like a brush, with steady strokes in the direction the hair grows, never against. It doesn't cut the harder hair of the outer topcoat but removes the loose finer undercoat, the main culprit when it comes to shedding.

Used a few times a week – outdoors if it's warm enough so you won't need to sweep up the flying fluff – it will cut down considerably on the hair that now adorns your couch, clothes, car seats, and carpet. It is rather pricey, but worth it when it comes to combating this hairy problem. But don't throw your slicker brush away; in addition to removing built-up pockets of shed hair we call "packing," brushing distributes coat oils from the skin throughout the hair shafts, infusing them with protective lipids in the process

There are some other things you can do as well. What are you feeding your Pug? With his breed's potential skin, coat, and shedding problems, he may benefit from a diet with fish-based protein and omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. A premium food with these ingredients will also strengthen his immune system.

When you bathe your Pug, do not use human shampoo or detergents that will strip the oils from his coat, worsening the shedding problem. Instead, use a tearless pet shampoo or one containing oatmeal if his skin is dry and flaky. Follow up with a conditioning crème rinse to loosen any additional dead hair, then rinse thoroughly to make sure no soap is left in the coat. Use a cotton ball lightly dipped in baby oil to clean out his facial wrinkles but do not get it – or the shampoo - in his highly sensitive eyes.

If the shedding remains out of control, take him to the vet for a health check. Dog health problems like hypothyroidism or Cushing's disease can cause hair loss as can the tiny mites that cause demodectic or sarcoptic mange. Allergies from food or his environment may also trigger such problems.

Most double-coated dogs shed most profusely in the spring and fall as their coats adapt to seasonal changes but Pugs beat them paws down; they shed year-round. It might bother you less if your sofa and car seats have upholstery that matches his coat color and you eliminate everything black and navy blue from your wardrobe!

For those of you deciding on a breed, if you don't want to decorate or dress around your dog, a pug might not be for you. Check out dog breeds that don't shed.