

The Great Shave Debate

Shaving a dog down saves times but could lead to irreparable coat damage.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I just cringe when I see beautiful double-coated dogs shaved down. I've heard many grooming shops defend this practice saying it's good for the dog and it saves time. I've also read about sunburn, coat, and skin problems that can occur when shaving the coat down to the skin. As a novice groomer, I ended up leaving a job because I was criticized for not shaving the dogs completely bald. Do you ever think there will be a time in the grooming industry when people might talk about these types of shaving issues?

A. I applaud you for wanting to find out if this practice is harmful. The short answer is it depends on the dog. In my shop, we never shave a Northern breed such as the Husky, Samoyed, Norwegian Elkhound or Keeshond down close to the skin – or a Labrador Retriever or German Shepherd Dog either – because their double coats can be irreparably damaged in the process.

Brushing out the undercoat, and some trimming and shaping is fine, but cutting the hair to the point where you end up with a bald dog may permanently damage the hair follicles. The dog may end up with a moth-eaten appearance – bald spots here and bits of fluff there – for the rest of his life instead of the beautiful coat Mother Nature provided for its protection. Unfortunately, as a novice groomer, I did shave a Samoyed down at the insistence of his owner and I saw the results firsthand. I learned this lesson the hard way.

On the other hand, many dogs can be clipped short with no ill, but I still don't think shaving them right down to the skin is a good option unless they are so matted that there is no alternative.

Neither is it necessary to shave dogs down in the summer to keep them cool. A well-brushed coat has "loft," allowing air to circulate within it and cool the pet while offering natural protection against the elements.

I am glad you are dedicated to the health and well-being of the dogs you work with. Good luck in your grooming career.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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