

Trimming a Dachshund's Nails

Keeping dog nails short is important for aesthetics and health.

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Posted: February 29, 2012, 9 a.m. EST

Q. I have a Miniature Dachshund. I cut her nails myself. They have been somewhat neglected, but not terribly neglected. They are not so long as to cause her discomfort, but to the eye I can tell they are too long and they click when she walks on the hard floor. As this is the case I can only cut the tips each time I cut her nails so that I don't make them bleed. I have heard that the quick of the nails will draw up each time you cut them. Is this true? If it is true, how long does it take for the quick to draw up? How often should I cut the nails in order to get them as short as they properly need to be for her comfort?

A. If your little Dachshund's nails make it sound like she's wearing tap shoes when she walks across your hardwood floor, they are probably too long. You are heading in the right direction by cutting off those tips often but unfortunately you are also correct in your assumption that just "tipping" them will not retract the quick—that vein inside each nail that bleeds when you nick it. If the nails are only tipped, the quick will continue to grow, eventually making it impossible to obtain the shortest desirable length for your dog's comfort and foot health.

Although nails that are too long can spoil the look of a dog's neat tight feet, nail trimming is not just done for cosmetic reasons. Overgrown nails can interfere with your dog's ability to walk and run, impeding her ability to get the exercise she needs to stay healthy and prevent unwanted weight gain that often results from life as a couch potato. For a Dachshund, preventing obesity is particularly important. Because of this breed's distinctive long back and short legs, it is particularly susceptible to disk problems and carrying extra poundage increases that likelihood. In fact, teaching these little wiener dogs to stand up on their hind legs or allowing them to jump off furniture should be strongly discouraged because these activities can aggravate their elongated spinal columns, leading to debilitating back pain and even paralysis. Overgrown toenails can also deform a dog's feet by permanently splaying out the toes and can cause major discomfort by breaking or becoming ingrown, painfully digging into the footpads.

At this point, I would recommend having the vet trim your dog's nails while she is sedated because the only way to retract those quicks is to cut them. Since this would be painful and stressful to your pet, letting her sleep through this procedure would be the kindest solution. Her nails will heal very quickly and from then on, trimming them regularly at home will prevent this situation from recurring.

You should cut them as short as possible without cutting into the quick. Dachshunds usually have black nails so that vein inside is not visible but if you study the nail's appearance as you perform this chore, you will note that it has rings like a tree trunk inside. The darkest portion in the middle of the nail bed is the quick. If you continue to cut until that dark circle covers most of the nail bed and you see a tiny white dot in the middle, you have gone as far as you can go. On most Doxies, the rear nails are shorter than the front ones because they use them to push off, grinding them down as they dig into the ground or pavement.

Most Dachshunds do not like having their nails trimmed. Because of the shortness and dwarf-like angulation of their legs, it's not easy to hold them without causing discomfort. I prefer to have these dogs on my grooming table using a nylon noose attached to the grooming post and beginning with the rear paws with my back to the dog and my body helping support and control it as I work like a harrier shoeing a horse. I cradle the paw in my palm with the pads facing up, holding it firmly but not squeezing as I work. Moving to the front feet, I repeat this technique and if the dog gets too squirmy or feisty, I have a helper hold the head and give a firm "no" and strong eye contact to correct this objectionable behavior.

As with most breeds, if you start when your Dachshund is a puppy by playing with its paws and trimming them on a weekly basis, the procedure will become an accepted part of your routine. Offering happy praise and a treat helps prevent this necessary procedure from becoming a lifelong struggle with these adorable little four-footed characters who like to think of themselves as large and in charge.