

Most Dogs Hate This – How to Turn It Into a Pampering Session Instead of Dread

This is often a stressful time for your dog. But with a bit of thoughtful planning and preparation, it could become a pleasant time of pampering and bonding. Here are the eight essentials to turn it from high-stress to high-pampering. Your dog will love you for it.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Bath time for your dog shouldn't be an unpleasant experience for either of you, nor does it need to be stressful
- With a little planning and preparation, you can help your canine companion relax and maybe even enjoy some bath time pampering
- Things you can do to keep your dog's stress to a minimum include helping her feel safe in the tub, and keeping her ears and eyes protected from water and shampoo

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Many dogs hate bath time, which is too bad, because with proper preparation, bathing your dog doesn't have to be stressful for either of you.

8 Steps to Less Stress at Bath Time

1. **Brush your dog first** — Give your dog a thorough brushing right before bath time to remove dirt, debris, dead hair and mats from his coat. Brushing before a bath will make brushing after the bath much easier. If your dog enjoys being brushed, this is also a good way to help relax and soothe him before a bath.

You can also remove your dog's collar at this time, or leave it on to use (very gently) as a handle to steady him while you're bathing him.

2. **Choose the best spot to bathe your dog** — Since most homes aren't equipped with a raised tub like you see at veterinary clinics and grooming shops, if you have a small dog, you can use a laundry room or shop sink, or even your kitchen sink.

For larger dogs, the bathtub usually works (though it can be hard on your back), or a walk-in shower. If it's a nice day and warm enough that your dog won't get chilled, you can bathe her outside using a garden hose.

Make sure to get your bath supplies ready beforehand, including towels and washcloths, a pouring container for water if necessary, shampoo and conditioner and so forth. Leaving a wet dog standing alone in a tub or sink while you dash off to get the shampoo you forgot is inviting disaster.

3. **Help your dog feel safe in the tub** — First, make sure the water temperature is comfortable — not too hot or cold. Most tub floors feel slippery under a dog's paws, so put a towel down on the bottom of the tub so your pet feels more secure during his bath. It can also save you from having to support a larger dog who keeps losing his footing.

If your dog seems anxious or fearful in the bath, try to enlist a helper to hold him steady and help him feel safe. Your helper can soothe your dog and maybe offer him the occasional treat for being a good boy during his bath. The goal is to create a positive experience so your dog won't develop an extreme dislike or fear of being bathed.

4. **Keep those ears and eyes protected** — Put a cotton ball just inside each of your dog's ears to prevent water from getting in them. Most dogs don't enjoy having water sprayed or poured on their heads, and it's really not the safest or best way to get the face and ears clean anyway.

Another reason it's not recommended to pour water over your dog's head is because she can develop secondary ear infections from moisture getting into the ear canal. And no matter what shampoo you use — even if it says it's safe around the eyes — it's not advisable lathering your dog's head.

If for some reason you must, it's important to hold her chin up and rinse toward the back of the neck and not down over the face to avoid getting shampoo in her eyes.

5. **Lather front-to-back** — Wet your dog's entire body using either with a hose or sprayer, or by filling up a container with water and slowly pouring it over him, saturating the coat and skin. Don't forget to wet all four legs and paws and his undercarriage!

Get your dog as wet as possible before applying shampoo, especially if he has a full or long coat, as it will make lathering and rinsing much easier.

Once he's good and wet, grab your all-natural shampoo made specifically for dogs. You can use either a body bar that you hold in your hand as you lather, or a liquid shampoo, in which case you'll want to pour a line of shampoo down his back and massage it into his coat and skin.

If your dog has super-thick hair you can dilute your shampoo 50/50 with water to assist in getting the shampoo down to the level of your dog's skin. Lather his back and sides, his underside, legs and paws, armpits, the area under his neck, his backside, groin area and tail.

6. **Rinse, rinse and rinse some more** — It's really important to rinse all the soap and residue off your dog, which can take some time with a long or dense coat. Shampoo that dries on the coat or skin can be irritating, and it will also get dirty and matted in a hurry.

So even though your dog is looking a bit like a drowned rat and is more than ready to be out of the tub, take your time and make sure you've rinsed her thoroughly.

Once she's rinsed, use a washcloth to clean her face and around her eyes while she's still in the tub. Gently wipe away any gunk that may have collected in her facial folds (if she has them) and under her eyes.

Next you can sort of wring or pat water out of your dog's coat, and then grab a towel and rub her down a bit before lifting her or having her step out of the tub. The second she's out of the tub and free of your grasp, she'll start her very efficient "self-drying shake," so be prepared!

7. **Drying your dog** — Short-haired dogs often just need a bit of toweling and a few shakes to get dry. Dogs with longer or dense coats, however, generally need either lots of toweling and/or blow drying.

Most dogs aren't crazy about the blow dryer, so if yours isn't, it's best to towel her dry, making sure to keep her warm, especially in the colder months. It's easy for dogs to get chilled when their skin and fur is wet.

Don't let your dog get to the point of trembling. After each bath, attempt to use the blow dryer again — she may or may not get more comfortable with it the more she's exposed to it.

Remember to keep the dryer setting on low heat, and if she gets nervous or anxious, you should stop. The goal is to create a positive bathing experience, since this is something you'll be doing for your dog for the rest of her life. The calmer she is with the process, the easier it will be on both of you.

8. **Finish up with ear cleaning** — Now it's time to remove the cotton from your dog's ears and check them for dirt and gunk. The rule is to clean your dog's ears when they're dirty. If they produce plenty of wax every day, they'll need to be cleaned every day. If they don't produce a lot of wax or collect much gunk, you can clean them less often. If you leave wax or debris in your dog's ear canal, it's the foundation for infection.

When you need to clean his ears, you can either put the ear cleaner directly down into the ear (as long as the directions say it's safe), or you can apply it to cotton balls and then swab out the wax and debris. If you pour or squirt the solution directly into the ear, before your dog can shake his head you'll want to massage it in so it thoroughly coats the inside of the ear. Use as many cotton balls as it takes to get to a clean cotton ball from each ear.

It's nearly impossible to put a cotton ball too far into your dog's ear, so there's no real danger of rupturing an eardrum or hurting or irritating the ear. You can substitute gauze for cotton balls if you prefer. The outside, floppy part of your dog's ear is called the pinna. Once you're done swabbing the inside of the ears, use a clean cotton ball to swab and disinfect the pinna of each ear.

I hope these suggestions can help your dog experience bath time with a minimum of stress. As far as frequency, it's best to bath your dog whenever she's dirty, stinky or has skin allergies or a minor skin infection.

Sources and References

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