

Your Dog May Consider This Torture – Even if You Don't

It can instill deep fear in your dog, regardless of how essential you think it is. From his perspective, there are five means of torture, maybe even six. Fortunately, these naturally calming supplements will help him relax and it'll calm your nerves too.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many dogs don't enjoy trips to the groomer, especially dogs who don't like car rides or having certain body parts handled
- Consider finding a groomer who is willing to let you do a trial run with your dog before his first appointment, and who is familiar with fear-free handling and other techniques for calming anxious pets
- Mobile and in-home groomers can be a great alternative for anxious dogs (and their owners)
- Exercising your dog before a grooming appointment can also be beneficial

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Many dogs don't enjoy visiting the groomer, and it's easy to see why when viewed from your canine companion's perspective:

- Strange smells, sounds, dogs, and humans
- Those cramped, uncomfortable little jail cells
- Being drenched with water and having off-limits body parts manhandled
- The evil drying process
- Those scary scissors, clippers, and the dreaded Dremel

For dogs who don't get out much, a ride in the car can also be anxiety producing, so the stress begins even before you arrive at the groomer. And imagine how Buddy or Bella feels when you waltz out the door and drive off without them. "Wait! What? You're LEAVING me here?"

If trips to the groomer are torture for your dog, there are things you can do to make the experience more tolerable for him.

Help for Dogs Who Are Anxious in the Car or While Being Touched

- **If your dog doesn't like car rides** — If your dog isn't used to car rides he'll be anxious and stressed before he ever gets to the grooming shop. The best way to help him overcome his fear of the car is to take him with you as often as possible, and making the destination someplace fun, like a walk in the woods, a swim at a dog

beach, or a visit to a friend's house

If your dog tends to get carsick and it doesn't resolve after repeated short trips with you, try one or more of these tips for preventing motion sickness in dogs.

- **If your dog doesn't like to be handled** — To do a thorough job, the groomer needs access to all the areas of your pet's body, including potentially sensitive spots like the nose, eyes, ears, paws, tail, anal region, and groin.

If your dog objects to being touched on one or more areas of her body, try handling her at home until she's more comfortable.

During short desensitization sessions, start with areas of her body where she doesn't mind being touched, and work gradually toward "off-limits" areas. Use treats and verbal cues to smooth the way.

For example, if she doesn't like having her paws handled, before you actually touch her foot, give her the verbal cue "paw," then gently handle the paw while simultaneously giving her a treat.

Proceed slowly, keep handling sessions brief, and attempt them only when your dog is feeling calm and receptive. If you don't feel like you're making progress in desensitizing your pet to being handled, discuss the situation with your vet or a veterinary behaviorist.

Find an Awesome Groomer

Some grooming salons are really just clip shops that do a high volume of business or are run by people who don't know about or can't appreciate fear-free handling techniques and other strategies for helping pets cope with the whole grooming experience. Hopefully yours isn't one of them.

Ideally, you should be able to do a dry run with your groomer before you leave your dog for the first time. This means you bring your dog to the shop and instead of being bathed and clipped, he meets shop employees, gets patted and petted, enjoys several tasty snacks, and gets a general sense of the sights, sounds, and smells of the shop.

It's also a good idea to introduce him to the grooming table at this visit. Getting on and off the table should involve lots of praise and treats, whether he walks onto an electric table or is lifted up and down by the groomer.

The goal of the dry run for your dog, in case you haven't guessed, is to associate pleasant, fun things with going to the groomer. And don't forget to be friendly and appreciative to the grooming staff while you're there. The kinder you are to the people who care for your pet, oftentimes, the kinder they'll be to your dog when you're not around.

How About a Mobile or In-Home Groomer?

Many of my veterinary clients prefer having their groomer come to them. Some groomers have fully-equipped mobile units that park right in front of your home (or wherever you happen to be with your pet). Others bring all their gear to your home and do the grooming there.

There are a few advantages to having a groomer come to you. Number one, you avoid the car ride. Number two, a mobile salon is typically far quieter and less stimulating than a regular grooming shop.

Another benefit is that your dog doesn't have to cool her heels in a cage either waiting her turn, or after the evil deed is done. She's groomed immediately, and returned to you as soon as she's done. Many people also feel peace of mind knowing their precious companion is just a stone's throw away, or right down the hall with an in-home groomer.

The drawback is that mobile and in-home groomers are by necessity more expensive, and last-minute appointments may not be possible.

Additional Suggestions

- Exercise your dog right before a grooming appointment. Twenty or 30 minutes of playing fetch or another heart-pumping activity will tire your dog out, and make him less likely to be overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety and stress.
- Add a flower essence blend like Stress Stopper by Spirit Essences, Anxiety by Green Hope Farms, or Stress and Trauma Relief from OptiBalance to your dog's drinking water. Homeopathic Aconitum may also help.
- Invest in an Adaptil collar or diffuser for your dog. Adaptil is a pheromone and is designed to have a calming affect on dogs. The collar seems to work well for many dog owners with pups suffering from stress-related behaviors. Put the collar on your dog the morning of your appointment, and remove it just before grooming begins.

Sources and References

[VetStreet October 15, 2024](#)
