

# How to Bathe Your Dog

Washing your pet may seem like a fairly straight forward project, until you actually begin the process. In order to avoid frustration and the most common problems, Rocky Mountain Veterinary Dermatology has put together this guide to help you.

## Why bathe your pet?

The most common reason to bathe your dog is because he or she got dirty. The second most common reason is to eliminate a bad odor. Dr. Strauss often recommends bathing with a medicated shampoo for a specific medical reason (such as treating a bacterial or fungal infection, reducing scale or grease, or to moisturize the skin). Bathing is not a particularly effective treatment for itching. Benefits of bathing include; cleaning the skin and coat (which helps remove bad odors, loose hair, scale and debris), moisturizing the skin, and and improving the haircoat's luster. Bathing with medicated shampoos is a great way to apply topical (surface) medications to areas with fur (ointments don't work well with hair).

## Which Shampoo?

For general cleaning you should choose a mild cleansing shampoo. Hypo-allergenic, fragrance and dye free formulations are recommended. For treating specific dermatological concerns (dry skin, scale, infections, etc.) follow your veterinarian's advice. We recommend avoiding shampoos with tea tree oil (it can be toxic to some dogs).

## How do you actually bathe the dog?

1. Wet the entire coat down to the skin. Use warm (not hot water). Sometimes cool water is recommended for dogs with inflamed skin.
2. Put 1-4 tablespoons of shampoo (depending on the size of your dog) into the bottom of a large, plastic cup (soda pop cups work well). Fill the

cup with warm water to dilute the shampoo. This step helps avoid using too much shampoo and distributes the shampoo more evenly. Medicated shampoos are often very concentrated - you don't need much.

3. Pour the shampoo water over the dog from the top of the head to the tail. Avoid getting the shampoo into the dog's eyes.

4. Work the shampoo into the coat. Be sure to concentrate on any problem areas, and be sure you get it worked into the armpits and groin areas (these are the toughest to clean). Use a sponge or wash cloth around the face, ears and eyes. Medicated shampoos usually don't lather very well - this is OK, they still work.

5. Allow medicated shampoos to stay on for the recommended time (usually 5-10 minutes). This may seem like forever, but contact time is important for the active ingredients to work.

6. Rinse completely. This can't be over emphasized - be sure you get the shampoo out of the coat all the way down to the skin. If not rinsed completely, any shampoo can be irritating.

7. Follow with a conditioner or topical fatty acid if recommended.

8. Towel dry and keep the dog in a warm place until they are dry. It's easy for small dogs, puppies and elderly pets to get cold when they are damp. Long haired dogs can take several hours to dry.

## **Tips:**

1. Smaller dogs can be washed in the sink (this saves your back).

2. For larger dogs we recommend getting into the shower with you dog.

This way you are not trying to stay dry while bathing the dog. Also you can close the curtain or shower door which helps keep the pet contained.

3. Be sure the pet is restrained. They often become frightened when bathed and will try to get away. Using a nylon slip leash is helpful.

4. Go slow and try to keep everyone calm. Make it a good experience and it won't be as difficult next time.

5. Some dogs don't like to be sprayed - use your cup to pour the water on instead.

6. Some medicated shampoos are very irritating to the eyes. In these cases, it will be recommended to put some sterile eye lubricant into the eyes just prior to bathing.

7. After bathing it is a good idea to flush the ears. This will get any bath water that may have gotten in the ears out.
8. Throw old shampoos away. Most shampoos now have expiration dates on the bottom of the bottle because old bottles can become contaminated with a bacteria that can cause a painful skin infection a few days after bathing.
9. It is OK to bathe dogs frequently. They have many oil glands (sebaceous glands) in the skin which should quickly replenish oils to the skin and fur. It is difficult to dry out a dog's coat by over bathing unless you are using a very aggressive drying shampoo.
10. Much has been said and written about using a 'properly pH balanced' shampoo for dogs. It is true that dog's skin is slightly less acidic (higher pH) than human skin. This has led to the recommendation to not use human products on dogs. However, all skin has a great capacity to buffer (neutralize) weak acids or bases, so we believe this concern is unfounded. We have often prescribed or recommended human shampoos for dogs without any difficulty. However, human medicated shampoos are usually quite a bit more expensive than veterinary formulations with the same ingredients.
11. We don't recommend bathing cats unless absolutely necessary. Professional assistance may be needed to bathe cats.