



Q & A Session for the Veterinary team – Grooming 11th October 2021

Linda Ryan BSc (Hons) VTS RVN CCAB, Lynne Taylor MA (Oxon) MA VetMB MRCVS and
Emma Baker BVetMed MSc MRCVS

(Please note some of the questions have been re-worded to summarise them and additions have been made to a few of the answers. Where it was felt inappropriate or difficult to answer particular questions in an open forum, the questioners have been contacted individually and offered relevant help and advice.)

Q. What advice should vets give to the owners of fluffy/hairy puppies about grooming?

A. Suggestions - From an early age habituating them to handling and gentle brushing at home, habituating them to grooming equipment including the sound of things that sound like clippers from a distance at first, habituating them to the feel of something that vibrates when it touches them (?electric toothbrush/ phone app). Advice about body language so they don't accidentally sensitise instead.

Q. What should vets and nurses discuss with owner re groomers?

A. Getting in touch with local groomers long before they need to use them - find out their policy about "getting pets used to" grooming. Ideally, they would allow O to stay with pet at first/all grooming, so can use Lickimats/continuous treat delivery to help them develop a positive feeling about the experience and stop if puppy stops engaging with treats. Also, should encourage puppies and new rescues to visit habituate to the premises and staff prior to needing to be groomed. Ideally, they should be prepared to do a grooming in several sessions for babies or pets who are finding it difficult. If not perhaps find another groomer who is more behaviourally aware, or learn to do it themselves!

Q. Prevention is better than cure!

A. Get across the message that an unpleasant experience in early life or adolescence can have a lasting effect on the way pets feel about things they're going have to encounter for the rest of their lives so it is worth spending a lot of time and effort making sure the early experiences are as positive as possible i.e. prevention much better than cure! This applies to kittens as well as puppies.

Q. How should owners deal with pets who are already fearful or resistant to being brushed?

A. Suggestions - use consent-based method e.g., bucket game type process, or "start button" to give pet control so can develop trust that O will stop when they indicate that they are no longer coping. (If necessary, anxiolysis +/- sedation at vets to clip short first - see below). Work with an appropriately qualified, experienced and regulated behaviourist or trainer – don't "have a go"! Anxiolysis is not 'giving in' – it can really help pets to deal with situations that they are finding difficult and prevent long-term problems.



Q. How should vets deal with very matted pets who are presented to them?

A. Suggestions - Find out if they are matted because they won't let owner groom or because no-one has tried. Maybe it is undiagnosed pain, disability or other medical condition/influence. Handle v gently and use anxiolytics or sedation as necessary so can be dematted in least stressful way - avoid forceful physical restraint when scared or likely to sensitise them further. Clip very short to allow O to have time to habituate pet to brushing using consent-based method before new matts develop. **There is no shame in veterinary dematts – it's a welfare positive intervention!** Also consider analgesia during dematting/grooming procedures if pain is likely to be a factor and they will be manipulated/lying still for a prolonged period.

Q. What can vets offer for pets who are already scared/aggressive at the groomers?

A. Suggestions - Trial memory-blocking situational meds. If not sufficient to allow stress-free grooming, go for regular clipping at vets under sedation while O uses consent-based method to train to accept home brushing and clipping. Consider muzzle training as safety precaution first if risk of aggression towards owner and animal has learned to bypass subtle signals - but emphasise that animal should not be forced into position where feels need to bite and the muzzle training must be carried out using positive reinforcement methods so that the pet develops a good feeling about the muzzle (otherwise this will be an additional stressor).

Q. Is it ethical to dye pets' fur and do fancy clipping patterns?

A. Suggestions - We feel that grooming should be performed when necessary for the benefit of pets to keep their coat clean and comfortable. Anything further is for human gratification and may be detrimental to welfare, unless performed in a way that can be shown to be enjoyable for the pets. Pets are not here for our entertainment.

Q. What's the best way to deal with matted rabbits?

A. Suggestions - Rabbits v susceptible to stress-> gut stasis etc. Skin v delicate and easily tears when clipped. Rabbits are prey animals, and most do not enjoy being handled. Sedation (midazolam etc) useful to reduce stress. Keep upright if possible, to avoid stress of being held upside down. Breeds with long fur need regular gentle brushing. Caecotrophs stuck to perineum due to underlying health problem - very difficult to remove without pulling on skin but best not to try to bath as makes matting worse. Consider analgesia for those with likely underlying o/a and spinal problems, and those whose skin is sore. Careful cutting fur between caecotroph and skin is probably most effective but can be very time-consuming. Big risk of flystrike.

Remember patient-friendly practice for every intervention and recommendation.

Q. What are your best tips for getting a dog over a water aversion who needs grooming?

A. To begin with having the dog stand in the shower/a tub on a dry towel, gradually gradually making it damper, and then wet, always keeping the water warm, and always progressing at a pace that was easy for the dog, so that it barely perceives a change from dry to wet, and then soggy. Noodle mitts are also very helpful for removing dirt from the coat, with barely any wetness – these are made of micro fibre fimbria. In many cases, it's possible to do spot cleaning, rather than whole dog bathing, even if they roll in fox faeces! If a dog really needs to be bathed, anxiolytics should be used as required, while ensuring that they get neither too cold if they were a little bit sedated, or too hot, if they are unable to use behavioural signs to show that the temperature isn't comfortable.



Q. For positive rewards, do you find that most dogs and cats respond to some sort of food, or do you need to use other rewards such as toys for some?

A. You never know until you 'ask' your cat or dog what food they'll work for. Some are happy with kibble, and some require higher value food. So it depends on the individual, and if they won't eat we need to ask why are they not eating, or whether we haven't used the right food. But we definitely wouldn't use toys in a setting in which we wanted animals to be calm, as in veterinary training or grooming training, or even in the real life situation of the vets or groomers because we don't want high levels of emotional arousal when we just want a calm positive state. We don't want the animal to be really wound up because, if they get suddenly frustrated or suddenly surprised by something, it could quickly develop into a dangerous situation. So we would use the food the animal has shown they are happy to work for, in the given situation, and work around them. If they are not eating, we'd want to know why - are they anxious or painful, or is there something distracting?