

# How to Shave Hair Mats Safely

## BACKGROUND

Hair mats can occur on both dogs and cats. Some dogs have long and fine hair that must be brushed daily, and hair mats can form if this is not done. Some long- or shorthaired cats become overweight or arthritic and cannot groom themselves, and this leads to hair mat formation. Whichever the case, hair mats must be removed safely, as they can cause sores or lesions on the skin under the mat.

## GETTING STARTED

Equipment needed:

- Grooming clippers. These can be purchased (or sometimes rented) from pet supply stores, groomers, and some veterinary hospitals.
- Size 10 clipper blade
- Clipper blade wash
- Clipper blade lubricant
- Pet brush

## TROUBLESHOOTING BEFOREHAND

Scissors should never be used to remove hair mats. Often, hair mats are very close to the skin. If scissors are used, the skin may accidentally be cut while trying to remove the mat.

If your pet has many hair mats, a professional groomer may be best able to remove the mats initially. You may then be able to maintain a healthy haircoat after the initial grooming.

During a long period of grooming, clippers should be allowed to cool off. The functioning of the blade causes friction, and the blade can become extremely hot and burn the pet's skin.

If at any time your pet shows resentment to having this done, stop the procedure and call your veterinarian or groomer for further advice. The skin may be too painful to remove the mats without sedation, and it is imperative that you not cause pain, put yourself in a position of risk of being bitten or scratched, or both.

## PROCEDURE

- Clipping should be done on a dry pet – do not give a bath before attempting to clip. Conditioners and detanglers don't really work on matted hair, anyway (though they can make brushing a messy coat easier).
- New clipper blades should be cleaned with clipper blade wash prior to starting.
- Apply a small amount of clipper lubricant to the clean, dry blades.
- Place your pet in a location that is safe and comfortable, using a leash that can be secured to keep the pet in one location if needed.
- If the pet tries to leave the grooming area or becomes uncooperative, enlist the help of a friend or family member or bring your pet to a professional groomer. If your pet becomes aggressive, do not proceed, but rather bring your pet to a professional groomer.
- If you only want the mats shaved and not the rest of the animal's hair, begin with the mat closest to the spine, and work your way toward the pet's toes.

- After turning on the clippers, hold them so the flat part of the clipper blade is parallel with the skin surface.
- The most common mistake is to hold the clippers perpendicular to the skin, pointing at the skin surface rather than gliding along the skin. This causes the clipper teeth to dig into the skin and is painful.
- Rather, be sure to hold the body of the clippers at a 45-degree angle to the skin surface so the clipper blade lies flat along the body surface.
- If you want to shave the entire pet, start near the neck, working toward the tail along the spine. Continue working toward the toes.
- Clip the hair mats in the same direction as the hair grows. This helps prevent accidental nicking of the skin.
- Thick hair mats that grow close to the skin may be more painful to remove. Work slowly, being careful to point the tip of the clipper blades into the junction between the skin and mat.
- Do not pull the hair mat up toward the clippers, as this may also cause accidental nicking of the skin; rather, gently elevate the mat to see the point of connection between mat and skin, and advance the clippers into this junction at the base of the hairs.
- If any skin lesions become apparent under the mat, you should call your veterinarian and schedule an examination. The lesion may need to be cleaned and medicated.

## AFTERWARDS

Once all mats have been removed, you should brush your pet entirely, ensuring no mats remain. A bath after clipping may be appropriate. Pets with long hair should be brushed daily to prevent recurrence. Be sure to concentrate on areas behind the ears, under the neck, chest, armpits, hips, and buttocks.



The flat part of the clipper blades is parallel to the surface of the skin, which is the correct technique.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *My pet won't let me brush him/her daily. What should I do?*

Simply trying different types of brushes to see which one works best, and offering a treat as a reward after brushing, can be very effective. It may be best to keep the hair short to prevent mats from forming. If your pet is overweight and unable to groom himself/herself, you should implement a weight-loss program with the help of your veterinarian. Once a pet loses weight, self-grooming becomes more manageable. If arthritis interferes with grooming, your veterinarian can help develop a pain control program.

### *What causes hair mats?*

Most hair mats are caused by long, fine hair that becomes tangled. Pet stores sell products that can prevent tangles; however, these

products alone do not prevent all hair mats, and you should remain diligent about grooming even if you use these products on your dog or cat.

### *Is it safe to sedate my pet for grooming?*

You should call your veterinarian to discuss the side effects of sedation. Age, breed, patient disposition, and any medical issues are important factors when determining the associated risks.

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