Even the cleanest of pets can sometimes need a bath. For dogs, regular bathing can help keep their skin and haircoat healthy. In general, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) recommends bathing your dog about every 3 months; however, certain breeds and dogs that spend a lot of time outside may need to be bathed more often. Cats, on the other hand, generally do not need regular baths—their tongues are designed to be an essential grooming tool. However, there are situations when your cat—or dog—may need a bath:

- If your pet comes in contact with a potentially hazardous substance or sticky material
- If you are allergic and want to keep pet dander to a minimum
- If your pet goes or gets outside and comes in contact with dirt or fleas
- If a medicated shampoo is prescribed or recommended by us to treat a certain condition

Prefering for a Bath

Try to make bathing a pleasant experience for your pet—and for you! If you can teach your pet to enjoy being bathed, it can be another way to strengthen your relationship. However, even the calmest of pets (especially cats) may become stressed around water. Make sure you have everything ready ahead of time to keep bath time as short and relaxed as possible:

- A tub (indoors or out) or sink with warm (not hot) water
- A spray hose or nozzle or a large plastic pitcher or unbreakable cup
- A washcloth for cleaning your pet’s head and face
- A rubber bath mat to keep your pet from slipping
- A mild shampoo made for dogs or cats (depending on your pet) or the prescribed medicated shampoo
- Old clothes to wear (for cat owners, make sure you are protected against scratches and bites)
- Plenty of large, absorbent towels and/or a blow dryer, if your pet will tolerate it
- Toys and treats for rewarding good behavior

It may be beneficial to have another person assist you in restraining your pet during the bath. If you are comfortable doing so, you can trim your pet’s nails the night before bathing to minimize the chance of scratches. Mats, tangles, and loose hair are also easier to remove by brushing before bathing.

The Bath

- Make sure the water in the tub or sink is not too deep for your pet. For cats
and small dogs, 3 to 5 inches of water is enough. Place your pet in the water and, if you have one, use the spray hose to thoroughly wet your pet, being careful not to spray directly in his or her eyes, ears, or nose. If you don’t have a spray hose, use the plastic pitcher, cup, washcloth, or your hands to scoop up the water in the tub.

- Gently massage the shampoo into your pet’s haircoat from head to tail. Follow the labeled instructions carefully. Don’t forget to lather hard-to-reach areas, such as between the legs and the body. Avoid getting any shampoo in your pet’s eyes, ears, nose, or mouth. Use the washcloth to wipe the face/head.

- Thoroughly rinse your pet, again taking care to avoid the ears, eyes, and nose. You may need to drain and refill the sink or tub a few times to make sure you have removed all of the shampoo. Don’t forget to check the feet, under the chin, under the abdomen and chest, and any other areas that can be hard to rinse. Shampoo residues left on the skin and hair can be irritating; cats, in particular, may lick them off later, which can cause illness.

- Dry your pet with the towels or a blow dryer on a low setting. If you use a blow dryer, you may need to slowly introduce your pet to the sound of the dryer. Also, make sure that the blow dryer air doesn’t get too hot for your pet. If you can only towel dry your pet, be sure to keep him or her in a well-controlled climate until completely dry.

- Give your pet a toy, treat, and/or calm praise as a reward for good behavior.

If you have any questions about bathing your pet—or whether he or she needs bathing—please ask! We are happy to help you keep your pet clean and healthy.

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