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Trimming Nails and Brushing Teeth



How can I get my puppy or kitten used to handling for different procedures?

Beginning handling, nail trimming, grooming and brushing teeth when the pet is young and has not yet had any negative experiences can allow for the greatest chance of success, because young pets are more easily adapted to new situations and more motivated by toys, treats, or food rewards. In addition with slow progress and highly positive rewards your puppy or kitten may learn that these are enjoyable activities.

How can I get my pet to allow me to trim its nails?

Unfortunately, dogs and cats that are sensitive about having their feet restrained and those that have had an unpleasant nail trimming experience can be difficult to improve.

For training, you should take the pet's favored rewards and use them to gradually accustom the pet to nail handling and trimming. Once the pet will lie or sit quietly and comfortably for rewards, progressively associate the pet's favored toys and rewards with the following steps:

1. Handling the feet
2. Putting a small amount of pressure on each toe during handling
3. Having a nail trimmer in hand while handling feet
4. Touching the nail trimmer (or a metal nail file) to the toes while holding them in place
5. Snapping or clicking the nail trimmer after touching each toe
6. Gently snipping or filing the end of each toe

Do not try to do all the feet at the same session. Initially, it may only be possible to trim one or two nails before the dog is agitated. The goal is for your pet to associate the handling of the feet and nail trimming with a pleasant outcome. If you progress a little too far and begin to see agitation, allow the puppy or kitten to settle, give a final reward and then end the session. Even if your pet cooperates, it is not necessary to do all the toes at once.

Progress as quickly or as slowly as your pet will tolerate, always ending on a positive note. With highly motivating rewards you should be able to keep your pets focus and give rewards during food handling and trimming of nails. As you become more experienced and confident the nail clipping should become quicker and easier. For dogs, a head halter can help ensure restraint and eye contact, and where necessary can be used to close the mouth and prevent escape. Until the pet is used to having its nails touched, filed, or trimmed, it is advisable to avoid any excessive restraint or traumatic nail-trimming events, as these may be difficult to overcome once they have been experienced.

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How can I progress to teeth cleaning?



Although dental toys and dental foods and treats can be useful, brushing of the pet's teeth and treating the gums of pets with dental problems are procedures that your dog should learn to accept and hopefully enjoy. Once the pet will lie or sit quietly and comfortably for rewards, progressively associate favored treats, flavored spreads and flavored toothpastes with the following steps:

1. Handling and rubbing around the muzzle
2. Lifting the lips and using a food-flavored toothpaste on the outer surfaces of the teeth (if the pet resists, you might want to try beginning with a food spread such as cheese or pate or perhaps a fish paste or fish oil for cats)
3. Using a finger, finger brush, cloth, or gauze square to rub the toothpaste along the teeth
4. Increasing the sessions to longer rubbing and cleaning of the outer surfaces
5. Moving to a tooth brush if possible

Alternative products such as dental chews, dental sprays, and dental wipes may prove more practical for some owners. Associating rewards with the sessions, before, during, and after, can help keep dental care a positive event.