



## IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE



### 1. CAT GROOMING: BRUSHING, BATHING, NAIL CLIPPING, AND MORE

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### 2. CHUNKY CANINES: DOG OBESITY ON THE RISE

Recent studies have found that the incidence of obesity in both pet dogs and cats is steadily rising. This is worrying as obesity in pets can result in serious health concerns.

### 3. RECOGNISING SIGNS OF STRESS IN DOGS

Over the last few years a number of studies have identified that large numbers of dogs are failing to cope with aspects of domestic life.

### 4. INTERPRETING DOGS' EMOTIONS THROUGH GROWLS

Are we getting as good at understanding dogs' emotions as they are of ours? Research has found that some humans (especially women) are surprisingly good at interpreting a dog's mood by its growl.

## CAT GROOMING: BRUSHING, BATHING, NAIL CLIPPING, AND MORE

Cats are neat freaks. In fact, if you're a cat owner, you know firsthand that your cat is a fastidious groomer. After all, it seems to spend most of its life either sleeping or grooming!

But as gung-ho as your cat is about keeping itself groomed and clean, the truth is that it could still use a bit of help from you.

Grooming is about more than just keeping your cat looking good. Grooming your cat on a regular basis will also help you to keep an eye on its health. Grooming your cat can even help to prevent feline health issues such as digestive problems caused by hairballs. Regular grooming can also help to improve the health of your cat's skin and coat.

outcome is likely to be unpleasant for the both of you.

Instead, slowly accustom the cat to the process of grooming.

Pick a time when the cat is relaxed and content – after eating, perhaps. Then start with short grooming sessions of maybe 5 to 10 minutes. Pet and praise the cat as you're grooming, and maybe even offer a treat at the end of the session. And if the cat begins to show signs that it's none too happy about what's happening, stop for now. You can try it again later.

With time, the cat will become accustomed to the process, and will likely come to enjoy it.

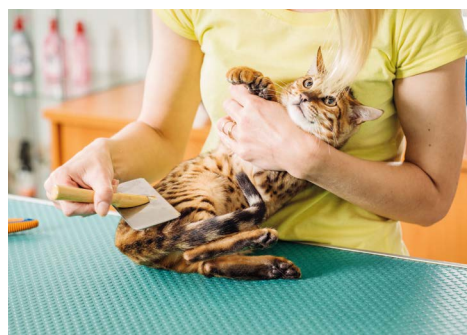
### Brushing Basics

Regular brushing offers benefits such as removing dead hair and dirt, and removing or preventing mats and tangles. But do it right, or you'll end up with a cantankerous kitty on your hands!

Always brush in the direction that the hair naturally lays, never against the 'grain.' And be extra gentle around the belly and chest.

**For shorthaired cats:** Start with a fine-toothed metal comb. Run it through the cat's fur from head to tail tip. Watch for small pepper-like specks that could indicate the presence of fleas.

Use a bristle or soft rubber brush next to remove loose hair.



### Getting Started

If you're already a cat owner, this probably goes without saying: Don't just snatch up your cat one day and commence to grooming if you've never groomed the cat before. The



**For longhaired cats:** Start with a wide-toothed comb to remove debris that may be caught in the cat's coat. Carefully untangle any knots.

Next use a wire brush or a bristle brush to remove loose hair.

Consider using a toothbrush to brush around the cat's face.

And if you encounter matting in the cat's fur, don't try to cut it out; one or both of you may end up getting hurt.

Brushing twice a week should be plenty for most shorthaired cats, while a longhaired cat may need brushing every day.

### Bath Time (Say It Isn't So)

Does the idea of giving your cat a bath send shivers of fear down your spine? Understandable! It's well known that most cats aren't particularly fond of water. You may even have been witness to a vivid demonstration of this fact in times past.

Luckily, cats don't often need the help of a full-blown bath.

But on occasion, your cat's coat might become sticky or dirty to a degree that the old tongue-bath just isn't going to cut it. So you'll have to get involved. Fortunately, though, bath time doesn't have to be a time of terror for the both of you – if you do it right:

Start by making the water temperature pleasant. It should be warm – not hot, and not cold.

Use a shampoo that's made specifically for use with cats, and labeled accordingly.

Use a sink or tub in which you've placed a rubber bath mat, filled to a depth of just 3 or 4 inches.

Gently wet the cat down using a spray hose, but DO NOT spray or pour water directly on the cat's head – you don't want to spray or pour into the cat's eyes, ears or nose. If you don't have a spray hose, use an unbreakable container.

Start at the cat's head, and gently work in the shampoo from head to tail.

Rinse gently but thoroughly, making sure that all the shampoo is rinsed out. Again, be sure to avoid spraying or pouring water directly on the cat's head.

Gently pat dry with a large towel.

And one last tip: If your cat's nails need clipping, do it BEFORE bath time!

### Pedicure, Please

Getting your cat to accept having its claws trimmed by you really shouldn't be too difficult, IF you approach it properly.

Start out by spending some time just training your cat to be comfortable and accepting of having her feet handled. Begin to massage its feet on a daily basis. Do that by running your hand along its leg, and then very gently pressing with your thumb on the pad of each toe, causing the claw to extend. After a week or two the cat will likely become comfortable with its daily foot massage.

Once the cat is comfortable with the massaging, it's OK to clip. Use a quality, sharp clipper or nail scissors specifically designed for use on cats. Cut parallel to the flat of the claw, and clip off only the white tip. Be VERY careful to avoid the quick, which usually appears as a pinkish area that you can see through the translucent claw.

### It's Nice To Be Needed

Compared to certain other pets, cats are relatively low maintenance – a nice perk for cat lovers. But like all of us, your cat could use a helping hand now and then. Independent creature though your cat may be, it still needs your help in remaining happy and healthy.

And that's kind of a perk, too, wouldn't you agree?

*Source: <https://www.lovethatpet.com.au/cats/grooming/grooming-tips/>*

## CHUNKY CANINES: DOG OBESITY ON THE RISE

Recent studies conducted by the US Association for Pet Obesity Prevention have found the incidence of obesity in both pet dogs and cats is steadily increasing. The 2016 survey involved 187 veterinary clinics assessing 1224 dogs and 682 cats and the results showed 59% of cats and 54% of dogs classified as being overweight. This equals an estimated 41.9 million dogs, and represents a 1% increase on the 2015 result.

Pet obesity is not limited to the US however, with a 2008 Australian study revealing equally worrying overweight statistics for companion cats and dogs, while the issue is also now under the microscope in the UK, where since 2013 scientists with the GODogs Project at Cambridge University have been researching the connection DNA mutations may have on increased appetite and weight in dogs.

The Godogs study involved taking samples of saliva from 310 Labradors – a breed renowned for a tendency towards being overweight – and analyzing their DNA. The initial results revealed approximately one fifth of Labrador retrievers have a mutation known as pro-opiomelanocortin or POMC. This gene mutation was found to be significantly more common in those dogs selected to become assistance dogs, which could either be an aberration or simply a characteristic of food-loving Labradors since these dogs are disproportionately selected for a job where food treats are used as a reward in training. The study also found that there really is a hard-wired reason for some Labradors to be completely obsessed by food.

Of the other 78 dog breeds included in the study the gene mutation was only present in one other – the flat-coated retriever.



While obesity in dogs can result in serious health issues researchers have so far found little evidence to suggest diabetes is one of them. Like humans, overweight cats and monkeys are prone to develop diabetes but it remains unusual for dogs to do so.

DNA variations that affect a gene's ability to make the alpha-MSH peptide is generally associated with POMC-related obesity, but there is increasing evidence to suggest mutations in a part

of the gene that produces the related beta-MSH peptide also carries some risk of developing obesity, and Labradors lack this peptide.

Currently there is no drug on the market to treat canine obesity but research into this condition continues. Earlier this year a Polish study confirmed the connection between obesity and the same POMC gene mutation identified by earlier studies. The Polish team is now studying other obesity-prone breeds that lack the POMC mutation found in Labradors, yet may have other genetic variants that could influence the condition.

According to the studies conducted, the principal reason why dogs like Labradors become overweight is not their metabolism, but because of the amount they eat. They are so much more obsessed by food. If you own one of these dogs you are up against it trying to keep them slim. But you can keep them slim if you pay attention.

*Source: The Veterinarian July 2017*

# RECOGNISING SIGNS OF STRESS IN DOGS

As the majority of domestic dogs live in close proximity to human owners in a socially and physically rich and diverse environment, exposure to stressors is an inevitable part of the domestic dog's life. However, the impact of these stressors can be severely detrimental to both the emotional and physical welfare of the dog.

Over the last few years a number of studies have identified that a large numbers of dogs are failing to cope with aspects of domestic life. For example, approx. 19% of dogs are scared of visiting the veterinary practice, 7% show signs of fear when visiting a pet grooming salon, and a kennel environment also causing fear or stress. Furthermore, approx. 30% of dogs show signs of anxiety when left alone while 80% of dogs could be suffering without their owners recognizing their distress; 47% are anxious when meeting other dogs and 15% can show anxiety around the dogs with whom they live (PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2015). Another study showed that 45% of dogs exhibited obvious signs of fear in response to fireworks and other loud noises. Travelling and holidaying have also been identified as sources of stress for a considerable proportion of dogs (23%).

Recognising signs of stress in dogs	
Well known signs of canine stress	More subtle signs of canine stress
Turning body away	Sitting close to owners
Walking away from stressor	Pawing of owners
Yawning	Turning head away from stressor
Blinking	Staring at an item (e.g. the 2 <sup>nd</sup> hand on a clock or spot on wall)
Nose licking	Raised fore leg
Staring	Lying down
Stiffening	Ears back and/or flattened
Tail lowered or tucked	Creeping – slow deliberate movement
Scratching body	Body arching away
Full body shake	Rolling over to expose undercarriage
Ignoring owner requests for cooperation or responding in a distracted manner	Sniffing around or engaging in a seemingly meaningless displacement behavior
Shaking as though following a bath or swim	Shedding hair
Showing the whites of eyes or closing eyes	Higher tail carriage, tail vibrating in short, sharp bursts

Raised hackles	Crouching
Muscle tension	Sweaty paws
Trembling	Moving in slow motion
Inappetence for treats or snatching treats	Panting
Involuntary urination or defecation	Excessive salivation
Mounting behavior	Biting/chewing of lead or owner's hands/clothing
Lunging	Furrowed brow/raised eyebrows
Barking	Urine marking
Growling	Tightened muzzle
Snapping	Appearing sleepy/tired
Biting	Ducking, cowering or backing away to avoid contact from hands

## Alleviating stress in dogs

Whether at the veterinary practice, being exercised or in the home, the distressed dog requires an enhanced concept of coping and safety. Some vet clinics, like Port Kennedy Veterinary Hospital are already adopting practices to promote a stress-free environment and stress-free handling of animals. These extra measures combined with sensitive handling techniques that avoid inadvertent social threats, it is often sufficient to enable a consultation to occur. When exercised, use of a loose lead or long line and ensuring access only to environments that avoid known stressors can enable both dog and owner to relax and enjoy time spent outside the home. Within the home, avoidance of inadvertent threats (e.g. accidentally cornering a dog in a room or chair, staring at or leaning over the dog), owner observation of the dog's social signaling and the provision of a 'safe place' can enable an owner to gently encourage a distressed dog to distance itself from stressors.

You may also wish to consult a qualified dog behaviourist for further help. Talk to your veterinarian and he/she will be able to put you in contact with a behaviourist in your area.

Source: *The Veterinary Nurse*, April 2017, Vol.8, No.3



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# INTERPRETING DOGS' EMOTIONS THROUGH GROWLS

## Are we getting as good at understanding dogs' emotions as they are of ours?

Researchers have found that some humans (especially women) are surprisingly good at interpreting a dog's mood by its growl.



We know relatively little about the vocal communication system of dogs, and the most studied vocalization are the barks. When dogs became domesticated by humans, barking became their main way of communicating and these barks may have changed significantly over many thousands of years. However, it is thought that dog growls may not have changed much since canines diversified from their wolf ancestors.

On one hand this makes them interesting to study how information is encoded in their acoustic structure. But, on the other hand, it is also fascinating for us that dogs use them in strikingly different social contexts: during play and agonistic interactions.

The research team used recordings of 18 dogs growling in three different contexts: playing tug-of-war with a human, guarding food from other dogs, and responding to a perceived threat (such as an approaching stranger or another dog). They were particularly interested in monitoring several distinct features of the dogs' vocal expressions, including the length of each growl and its frequency.

Two sets of recordings were made, including two growls from each context and then played to 40 human volunteers in the study.

Each person was asked to record their impression of the first set of growls, rating their interpretation of the dog's mood on a sliding scale of five key emotions: fear, aggression, despair, happiness and playfulness. The participants had no idea about the actual context of the growl, they just heard the growl and then based on the acoustic structure they could rate the growl.

For the second set of recordings, people were asked to choose the context of the growl from three possible dog activities: playing, food guarding or responding to a threatening situation.

While most people could correctly identify playful growls and food growls (81% and 60% respectively), only half of the participants could

correctly interpret the threat-response growls. Further analysis of the findings showed that participants were often confused between the guarding-food growls and the threat-response growls.

Among those volunteers who took part in the research, women were the most successful at interpreting the dog growls, identifying them correctly 65% of the time, compared to 45% of their male counterparts in the study. This is a common pattern in emotion studies probably because women are more empathic and sensitive to others' emotions, and this helps them to better associate the contexts with the emotional content of the growls.



It was also found that people who owned a dog or worked with dogs regularly were significantly better at interpreting dog growls than those who did not.

The results of the study offered potential clues about each dog's mood. Dog growls relating to food guarding were found to be longer and the most aggressive of all, and there were audible differences between the "I want to play" short, quickly repeated growls and "that's my dinner, leave it alone" defensive ones. Happy playful growls and guarding food growls also had different pitch characteristics.

Researchers hope that the study might help us understand and improve our relationships with dogs and could be especially important for teaching children acoustic cues for interpreting the difference between playful and aggressive dogs.

Source: Companion Magazine, Q3 2017

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