

How to Clean Your Dog's Ears

courtesy of Animal Info Publications

Why do you need to keep your dog's ears clean?

Keeping ears clean is important for all dogs but more so for dogs that have long hair, ears that hang down, or a combination of both. Long haired breeds often suffer ear infections as a result of having a lot of hair growing inside their ears. The hair traps moisture and provides an ideal environment for bacterial and fungal infections to develop.



You should be aware that canine ears are sensitive organs that are easily damaged. The consequences of damaging the inside of the ear are serious so if you suspect a problem, do not poke around with a cotton bud. Signs of ear problems in your dog can include; scratching at the ears, pain when you try to clean them and a strong odour.

How do you safely clean your dog's ears?

You can clean the outer, easily accessed areas of the ear cavity with a cotton ball, swab or tissue soaked in an ear cleaner suitable for dogs. These ear cleaning solutions or special ear wipes are available from pet shops or vets. Never apply ear medication solutions (eg. Antibacterial, antifungal or anti parasite) to your dogs ear without a veterinary ear examination first. If the inner ear canal is ruptured or inflamed, you can cause severe damage and pain.

You should take care when bathing your dog in order to avoid water becoming trapped in the ear canal. Lift your dog's ears and sniff the canals and visually inspect them frequently. An infection will show as reddened, inflamed skin, it will have a strong odor and if severe your dog may have very tender ears and be upset when you clean them. A dog with an ear infection will also shake his ears frequently and may also scratch more than usual. If this occurs a visit to the vet may be indicated for some medication. However if you train your dog to accept ear cleaning and regular inspections from an early age, this problem is preventable and very manageable.

To clean you dog's ears follow the steps below -

- Many dogs are very sensitive about their ears so it pays to train your dog to accept this procedure from an early age. Pre-warm a small amount (about 5-10 mls) of the ear cleaning solution by drawing it up into a syringe and sitting it in a tub of warm water. Be very careful not to overheat and DO NOT use a microwave, you just want to take the chill off the solution. Your vet should be happy to supply you with some syringes. Alternatively you can buy small plastic bottles similar to eye drop bottles from your pharmacist or vet.
- Lift your dogs ear up and out from the head, insert the syringe or tip of the container gently into the external ear canal and squirt a small volume into the ear
- Quickly withdraw the bottle or syringe of solution and holding the dogs ear with its flap against its head, gently massage the solution into the ear canal. You should hear a slight squishy sound. If you

don't do this step quickly, your dog is likely to shake her head and fling out the ear cleaning solution before it can do its work!

- Wipe out the ear with soft cotton wool balls or pads.
- DO NOT attempt to clean the deeper parts of the ear canal as the horizontal auditory canal leads to the tympanic membrane which can be easily damaged and do not insert cotton buds into this area.
- If there is any pain during this procedure, see your vet.
- If you are uncertain about doing this yourself for the first time, ask your vet or vet nurse/technician to demonstrate the technique for you. If you have your dog groomed by a professional groomer then they will be happy to do this for you and will also be able to show you what to do at home.
- Puppies and dogs with healthy ears will generally not need to have ear cleaning solution inserted into the canal. You can simply apply the solution to a cotton wool ball or pad and wipe out the accessible part of the ear canal with that.

Removing ear hair is recommended for dogs with very hairy ear canals. This can be painful and result in resentment if not done properly so you should ask a vet or professional groomer to demonstrate ear hair removal for you before you attempt this yourself. Removal of excess ear hair can be made simpler by applying a small amount of special powder to the inside of the ear. This powder makes gripping the hair much easier and therefore shortens the process. You can simply remove a lot of the hair with your fingers. Surprisingly most dogs tolerate this very well as long as you do not grab too much hair at once. Hair that is a bit more difficult to access with your fingers can be removed with haemostats or tweezers. Be careful not to pinch the dog's skin or to dive too deeply into the ear canal.

Don't forget to give your dog a treat at the end of the session so it stays a positive experience.

How often should I clean my dog's ears?

A healthy dog's ears should only need cleaning every couple of months - however you should visually check them and smell the ears for offensive odors on a weekly basis. For dogs that are prone to ear infections you should follow the advice of your veterinarian on how often to perform an ear clean as this will vary greatly on an individual basis. Generally dogs with floppy ears should have them cleaned weekly. If you have a dog with hairy ears, plucking a small amount of hair on a weekly basis will help keep the growth under control and also avoid undue stress on your dog. It is worthwhile to train your dog to accept an ear clean even if it has the type of ear (pricked and open) that is not prone to infection. You never know what will happen in the future and dog that has healthy ears may need medications applied for other reasons (for example to treat inflammation after removal of a grass seed). A dog that is used to having its ears cleaned will readily accept medications being applied. See animalinfo fact sheet.....for further information on applying ear medications.