



The Matted Dog

What is a mat?

A mat occurs when hair twists together into tangles and knots. These knots twist together and form mats. They usually feel like clumps when you pat your dog. Sometimes the mats may lie close to the skin and the outer hair feels brushed out, but underneath it is like a twisted carpet of hair. The easiest way to tell if your pet is matted is to comb through the coat, all the way down to the skin. Use a fine to medium toothed comb. If the comb becomes stuck in any way in the coat, you have probably found a mat.

Why are mats bad?

Mats hurt. When mats are allowed to develop in a coat, the fur begins to twist and pull at the skin, hurting your pet. Think of it as having a tight elastic band in your hair and everywhere you turn another strand of hair pinches your skin. This pulling can cause blood circulation problems in the skin and be painful and uncomfortable for the dog.

The skin under the matted hair can become damaged from the lack of air and blood circulation. Moisture (from bathing, rain or snow, etc.) can become trapped, and with the dogs warm body temperature become a perfect breeding ground for bacterial growth. This can lead to painful hot spots and vet bills.

What can be done about mats?

Dematting is only an option on coats where the matting has not yet become severe, and if the pet can tolerate it. The tugging, pulling and ripping of dematting can be very painful for the pet, and it will damage the coat leaving it more susceptible to matting again.

In most cases the best, and most humane course of action is the clip down the coat and start from scratch. Our clippers are not able to cut through the mats and have to get underneath the matting. How short we must clip depends on the severity of the matting, and the closeness of the matting to the skin.

What may happen when my dog is clipped?

Although clipping is necessary, there may be side effects. The skin denied air circulation and stimulation from regular combing maintenance becomes quite sensitive and is easily marked, scraped or nicked by the clipper blades.

The dog may feel uncomfortable and strange after a clip down. This is not unlike the way that you would feel if you had long hair and trimmed it down very short. The dog may also hide and act embarrassed. It is best to bestow many praises on your dog and try to build his confidence back up.

Sometimes the clip down may reveal a hidden problem that was not seen through the matting, such as hot spots or eczema. The removal of the mats often allows a pet to now get at an itch that was previously hidden to them.

It is very important that you not allow your pet to excessively rub or scratch themselves or do any sort of self-mutilation. If your pet is really uncomfortable, you should seek veterinary care.

How do we prevent mats?

To prevent mats in our pets we need to do a few minor things. First we need to talk to our professional pet stylist and set up a regular grooming schedule. Most coated breeds need to be professionally groomed every four to six weeks. The longest any dog should go between grooming is three months.

For longer styles you need to keep your pet mat free. Regular brushing and combing must be done at home. Your professional pet stylist can show you the correct equipment and techniques you will need based on your dog's skin and coat type to maintain a healthy coat.

Take your time and enjoy the bonding that grooming your pet can achieve. Your pet will thank you for it with the years of love and attention they bring to your family.

The Professional Pet Groomers Association of Manitoba is an independent non-profit organization who's members care passionately about pet grooming and are committed to building a strong professional grooming society in the province of Manitoba.