Creature COMFORTS

Giving your cat or dog the very best loving care goes beyond the standard flea and worming treatments. Groomed fur, healthy skin and clean teeth all make your pet feel comfortable and help prevent common health problems. Rebecca Howden lists some ways you can give your furry friend's health and hygiene a little extra attention.

CLEAN TEETH

Dental problems are some of the most common – and most preventable – conditions seen by vets. Just like in humans, dental problems in cats and dogs are most commonly caused by a build-up of plaque on the teeth. If the plaque is not removed it can harden into calculus or tartar, which can cause inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) or of the tooth socket (periodontitis), eventually leading to infection.

The best way to prevent dental problems in your pet is to regularly clean their teeth with specially formulated toothpastes for cats and dogs. These products contain gentle abrasives and polishing agents to freshen your pet's breath and keep the teeth and gums clean. For the best results, look for products that also contain fluoride and sodium polyphosphate – which will help prevent further plaque build-up – and products that have a meaty flavour that will taste yummy to your pet, making them much more co-operative.

To use pet toothpaste, place a small dollop on your finger and gently massage your pet's teeth and gums. Be sure to keep soothing and reassuring your furry friend as you do so – it might feel strange to them at first. Once your pet is used to the feeling of having their teeth cleaned, you can start using a special pet toothbrush instead of your finger. Simply move the brush in the same circular motion, gently cleaning the teeth and gums.

FRESH BREATH

Stinky pet breath is no fun for anyone. As well as regularly cleaning your pet's teeth and gums, you can improve their dental hygiene by adding special products to their drinking water which help freshen the breath and prevent plaque build-up. Look for a specially formulated product containing xylitol – an ingredient commonly used in human dental-care products to prevent bacterial growth and plaque adhesion. These products can be used every day, giving you an easy way to keep your pet's teeth and gums healthy in between dental treatments.

CLEAR SKIN & EARS

Skin lesions and build-up of dead tissue can be painful for your pet. Help ease their recovery by using non-irritating cleansers designed to remove skin debris and dead cells, creating an optimal environment for tissue repair. Products containing lactic acid and salicylic acid can be applied directly to skin lesions, as well as gently massaged into your pet's ears to break down and clear out wax. This leaves the ears looking and feeling cleaner and aids the treatment of external ear infections. Always use these products as directed, and do not use on pets that have ruptured ear drums.

SOFT & HEALTHY FUR

A well-groomed coat not only makes playing with your cat or dog more pleasant and hygienic for you, it also helps keep your pet comfortable. Dirt and allergens in the fur can cause irritation to your pet's skin, so regularly grooming their coat to keep it clean and healthy is an important part of your pet-care routine.

When you bathe your pet, it's important to use products that are specially formulated for animals. If your pet has sensitive skin, avoid using soaps and look for pH neutral products. Shampoo that contains oatmeal and other natural products like aloe vera can help soothe and cleanse itchy, dry skin, removing dirt, chemicals and allergens from the coat without causing further irritation. ◓

HELPLINES

Dentipet Toothpaste Chicken Flavour (70gm $16.99, members $13.59) **Epi-Otic Ear & Skin Cleanser** (120ml $14.99, members $11.99) **Aquadent** (250ml $19.99, members $15.99) **Dermcare Aloveen Oatmeal Shampoo** (250ml $18.99, members $15.19) **Pyohex Medicated Shampoo** (250ml $16.99, members $13.59) **Pyohex Medicated Conditioner** (200ml $17.99, members $14.39)

Always read the label. Use only as directed.

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