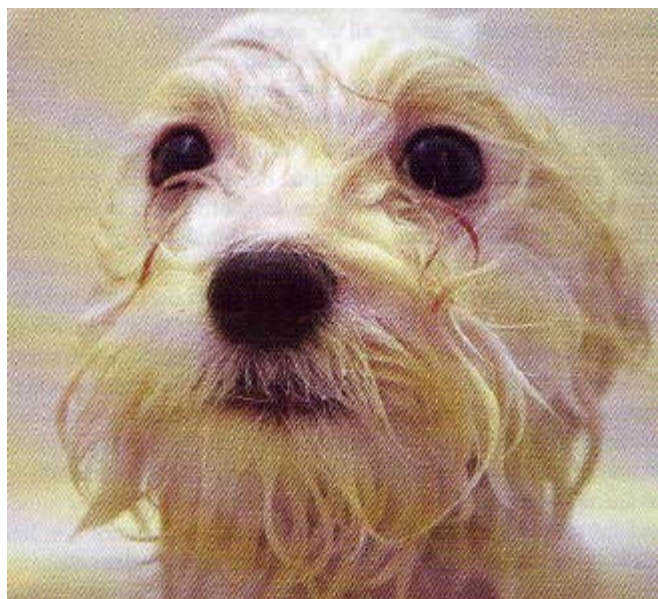


# The Science and Art of Bathing Dogs

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Put the dog in the tub and give it a bath. Right? Simple enough task... but the reality is that bathing any dog well is a balance of science and art. Bathing the dog and conditioning its coat and skin is an important part of the maintenance grooming process. To serve the dog and owner well, the bather must understand how product formulations impact the dog's coat and skin on a long term basis.

## The Science

Nature provides a healthy dog's coat and skin with a balance of natural elements including micro-flora, bacteria and sebum. But all dogs do not have normal skin. So consideration must be given to product formulation based on the individual dog's bathing and conditioning requirements.

## Consider pH

Most all shampoo products are pH balanced for a healthy dog's coat and skin falling into a range of 5.5 to 7.2. However, by design total alkalinity of most shampoo formulas is high, at around 150 to 200 ppm. The high alkalinity opens the hair shaft allowing beneficial shampoo ingredients to do their job. Repeated bathing without sealing the coat afterwards leaves the hair molecules puffed-up. The hair shaft is left open allowing minerals and residue to enter. Natural oils and moisture escapes. After long-term use coats can become dull and brittle. The alkaline deposits lead to an imbalance of natural skin elements that can contribute to the proverbial itch-scratch cycle.

On the other end of the shampoo spectrum is the repeated use of highly acidic shampoos. These typically citrus derived ingredients eat away at the hair's protective qualities, while stripping sebum from the coat and skin. This process creates dry, irritated skin and a limp, faded coat. As the dog scratches to relieve the itch, further skin irritation occurs. Aggressive scratching breaks the already damaged coat.

To reduce the negative effects of highly acidic or high alkaline products to the dog's comfort and skin health, a conditioner or coat sealer must be used to close and smooth the hair cuticle to restore moisture and elasticity to the coat and skin.

## Water

pH of the water used for bathing dogs is also an important consideration. Not only will it alter the stated dilution ratio of concentrated shampoo formulas, it will affect the way a shampoo formula cleans. Using a pH balanced shampoo in acidic or alkaline water counters the pH balance of the shampoo. Shampoo lathers best in water with a neutral pH.

## Heavy Fragrance

Be aware that heavily perfumed shampoo formulas are very drying to the pet's coat, skin and the bather's hands. Heavily scented shampoos leave the fragrance behind by way of polymers and copolymers, large molecules that build-up on the hair-shaft. After repeated use the residue leaches moisture from the coat and skin that eventually creates dull, limp, brittle fur and dry itchy skin.

It is far better for the health of the coat and skin to use a naturally or lightly fragranced shampoo formula. A stronger or more pleasing fragrance can be achieved without coat damage by using a spray of a cologne product on a small area of the dog's coat.

## How Do Shampoos Work?

Shampoo makes water "wetter" with the use of wetting agents, surfactants, emulsifiers, soap, detergents, or saponins.

Wetting agents reduce tension between the product, the coat and skin. The surfactant (an abbreviation of surface-active-agent) decreases the surface tension of grease, oil and water, breaking them down into smaller particles to aid cleansing.

Emulsifiers aid in mixing two otherwise unmixable ingredients, such as water and oil. Soap is a cleansing agent that bonds with dirt for easier removal. Is derived from salt and can burn eyes. High salt content in shampoos can make them harsh and very drying to skin and coat.

Detergents are synthetic cleansers which allow water and oil to combine and are derived from non-renewable petrochemicals. Depending on the formula, they can be mild or very harsh to coat and skin.

Tearless formula shampoos will contain saponins instead of soap or detergents. Saponins are a naturally derived form of soap made from plants such as coconut oil, palm oil or soapwort. These are considered the most gentle, least irritating and drying to coat and skin. These “soap free” formulas are also safe to use with spot-on products as they will not strip oils from the coat.

## Meeting Your Client's Bathing Needs

Many pets have special bathing needs based on skin health and condition, presence of ectoparasites, coat condition, coat type and color which means you will need to have a variety of shampoo and conditioning formulas on hand to meet your clients' needs.

In addition to your “house” shampoo, that is pleasant, mild and (hopefully) cost effective, you may want to offer these alternative formulas containing some of the listed ingredients.

For dogs with dry, flaky skin and lackluster, brittle coat you will need a moisturizing shampoo that is formulated to soothe and relieve dry skin. Soap and detergent free is best, and may contain some of these moisturizing ingredients: Allantoin, Aloe Vera, Amino Acids, Avocado, Biotin, Coconut Oil, Colloidal Oatmeal, Cucumber, Folic Acid, Jojoba Oil, Kelp, Lanolin Oil, Panthenol, Sorbitol, Spirulina, or Wheat Protein to name a few.

Dogs suffering from moist eczema, hot spots, flea bit dermatitis and body odor will benefit from a healing formula with antiseptic properties. Some ingredients are considered antibacterial or antifungal in nature: Alfalfa, Awaphui, Eucalyptus, Hydroxyethane, Lavender Oil, Neem Oil, Salicylic Acid, Sage, Tea Tree Oil, Undecylenic Acid, Zinc and more.

Hypersensitive dogs may suffer from inhalant, contact or food allergies. They may have dry, itchy skin and oxidized coat from licking. A hypoallergenic shampoo formula is a must have for use on these dogs. It will be soap, detergent, color and fragrance-free. This formula is appropriate when the dog's owner is hypersensitive to fragrances as well.

Naturally derived flea fighting shampoo formulas have become a better alternative to pesticides. Choosing pest fighting natural oils and ingredients is safer and better for you, the dog and the environment. Look for these ingredients when choosing a shampoo formula to rid your clients' dogs of fleas: Cedar Oil, Citrus Oil, Eucalyptus, Neem, Pennyroyal, Pine, Tea Tree Oil and others.

Color enhancing formulas will help to reduce yellowing and stains. They will enhance the coat color and in some formulas provide UV protection to prevent fading, especially in dark coats.

## Conditioning the Coat

The next step in the bathing process is the conditioning of the coat. Conditioning products typically have a very low alkalinity level. This aids the smoothing and sealing of the cuticle on the hair shaft. This step is critical to the long-term health of the coat and will benefit the skin as well.

Conditioners contain humectants and protein, which work together to draw moisture to, and bond with, the cuticle. Proper conditioning prevents static electricity and moisture loss which are major contributors to matting and hair breakage.

You will need to choose a conditioning product based on the dog's coat type.

*Long hair, drop or flat coats* require a moisturizing cream rinse product that seals and smoothes the hair shaft lending elasticity that helps to prevent coat breakage, static electricity and matting.

*Curly coats* require a light, body-building formula that seals the coat without weighing it down. A leave-in mousse or spritz formula works well. Cream rinse should not be used on sculpted breeds as it will make scissoring more difficult.

*Hard, double and smooth coats* require a protein based texturizing spritz that will enhance the wiry or stiff coat texture.

Never use a product that contains heavy oils that will clog hair follicles or prohibit the coat and skin from “breathing.”

Before applying any conditioning product, be sure the dog has been washed and rinsed well. Hold up a towel for protection and encourage the dog to shake. This pulls excess water from the skin allowing you to gently squeeze more water from the coat before applying the conditioning product. Too much water in the coat can dilute the efficacy of the product.

## The Art of Bathing

As with mastering any task, practice makes perfect, but a rote approach to bathing is doing a disservice to both your customer and the pet. The art of bathing is a two step process. First, you must correctly evaluate the dog's shampoo and conditioning needs. Secondly, you must use all of your senses to perform the procedures to the best of your ability and to the extent that the dog requires.

The practice of lathering every dog twice does not necessarily meet the goal of getting the dog clean. Success is not in the number of times the dog is lathered, but is in the results of the bathing and conditioning process.

Holding the spray nozzle against the skin to allow the force of the water to hasten the wetting and rinsing of the dog; and applying shampoos directly to the skin, not onto the coat by way of sponge; are techniques that can facilitate the process...but, it comes down to using your senses. Does the dog feel clean? This can not be detected by gloved hands. Does the dog smell clean? Place your nose by the dog's ears...this is where most owners cuddle with their furry friends. Many times the face and ears are the dirtiest parts of the dog after the bath! Does the dog look clean? Is the coat dull? Are there flakes in the coat? Is so...then the dog requires another lathering. After rinsing does the coat sound squeaky clean? Great, then you can move onto conditioning the coat.

Each step in maintenance grooming is an important step...from brushing and combing to bathing, conditioning and drying, the products, tools and techniques must be chosen and used in a thoughtful manner. Your clients will know and appreciate the difference!