

What Not to Do During Your Dog's Bath – Mistakes that Can Ruin Bath Time for His Lifetime ...

Dogs can be skittish about their baths anyway - but making these common mistakes can seal their misery for a lifetime. Discover the one thing to never ever do during his bath, how to protect his eyes and ears, whether to use a hair blower, and much more ...

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are many options for where to bathe your dog – the kitchen sink, the shower, the bathtub, out in the yard in warm weather – whatever you have available will work
- How to help your dog feel safe in the tub, and how to keep his eyes and ears protected from soapy water
- Addressing doggie acne, tear staining and other minor skin problems at bath time
- Something you should never do while bathing your dog
- How to thoroughly clean your dog's ears after a bath

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published October 11, 2011.

In this informative video, Dr. Karen Becker shows you the proper way to bathe your dog, including the best method for cleaning the face and ears.

Today I'm going to show you how to bathe a dog. It may sound kind of silly to demonstrate dog bathing, but many first time dog owners have written me or called me here at Natural Pet asking for a how-to video. They'll say, 'I have a new puppy and don't know what I'm doing!' Or, 'I just rescued a large-breed adult dog and don't know what I'm doing!' So I'm going to bathe one of my dogs, Rosco, on video and discuss tips and tricks and the best way I've found to go about getting the job done.

Options for Where to Bathe Your Dog

Here at my animal hospital I have the luxury of a raised tub, which makes the job easier on the back, among other things. Most people don't have a raised tub, of course. You can bathe a little dog in the kitchen sink or one of those deep laundry room or shop sinks. You can also bathe your dog in a walk-in shower or a regular bathtub. You can do the bath outside using a garden hose as long as it's warm enough that your pup doesn't catch a chill.

Some towns have do-it-yourself dog bath facilities where they provide the raised tub, all bathing and grooming supplies, and clean-up for a fee. In other words, there's no right or wrong place to do it — it's a matter of what you have available to use.

Keeping Your Dog Safe in the Tub

I happen to have the luxury of a hose in my raised tub to wet down the dog and do a thorough rinse. If you don't have a spray attachment in your sink or tub, you can use a container to get the job done — fill and pour, fill and pour, etc.

The bottoms of tubs are slippery, so I'm going to put a towel down in the bottom of my tub (without blocking the drain) so my 11 year-old Boston terrier has something to grip during his bath. The towel will help him feel and actually be more secure, which is helpful for any dog, but especially older dogs.

So now I've got Rosco in the tub. He doesn't seem too uncomfortable with what's going on, but I know he'd rather be somewhere else. If your dog is nervous or afraid in the bath, you should have a helper with you to hold her steady and help her feel safe. I have removed Rosco's collar, but if you need to leave your dog's collar or harness on as a sort of handle while you bathe her, that's absolutely fine.

Again, if your dog is new to bathing or seems skittish, I really recommend you have a helper with you who can soothe her and maybe offer her the occasional treat for being a good girl in the tub. The goal is to create a positive experience so your dog won't develop an extreme dislike or fear of being bathed.

Keeping Your Dog's Ears and Eyes Protected

Every dog is an individual, and in Rosco's case, he doesn't like to get his head wet at all – this is something I already know about him. In fact, most dogs don't enjoy getting water poured on their heads, and it's really not the safest or best way to get the face and ears clean anyway. I'm putting a cotton ball just inside each of Rosco's ears to prevent water from getting in them. I'm not going to bathe his head, but sometimes water spills or splashes where you don't want it to go, so I want to protect his ears just in case.

And no matter what shampoo you use — even if it says it's safe around the eyes — I don't recommend you lather your dog's head. If for some reason you have to, it's important to hold the dog's chin up and rinse the soapy water back toward the neck and not down over the face to avoid getting shampoo in the eyes.

Another reason I don't recommend pouring water over your dog's head is because lots of dogs develop secondary ear infections from moisture getting into the ear canal. So I'm going to bathe Rosco from the neck back, and then finish with a washcloth to clean his facial folds.

Getting Down to Business

First I make sure the water temperature is comfortable — not too hot or cold. The bottom of the tub is now getting wet, so the towel I've laid down will keep my guy from slipping around and feeling unsure of his stability. I'm just going to get him wet everywhere with the hose — down all four legs, over all four paws, and don't forget the undercarriage!

If you don't have a hose or sprayer, just fill up the container and slowly pour the water over your dog, saturating the coat and skin. Get your dog as wet as possible before applying shampoo, especially if he has a full or long coat. It will make lathering a lot easier, and rinsing as well.

Now that Rosco is good and wet, it's time for the shampoo. I use a variety of all-natural shampoos here at Natural Pet. I like tea tree shampoo for animals with skin infections. I don't recommend oatmeal shampoo unless your dog has no skin eruptions, no allergies, and a very dry coat.

Today for Rosco, I'm using a bar shampoo a master soap maker makes for me. It's called Detest a Pest, and because it's still summer here in the Chicago area and I'm doing all I can to keep fleas and ticks off my pets, it's a good one to use. This is called a body bar, which I just hold in my hand to do the lathering. If you use liquid shampoo, you'll just pour a strip of shampoo down your dog's back.

I recommend if your dog is dense or double-coated that you pre-mix some shampoo with water and then apply it. Otherwise, with a long-haired dog, you can end up with a wad of shampoo in one place that doesn't get adequately distributed to the whole body. Rosco, of course, has very short hair, so it's easy to lather him up with the body bar.

Rosco's Doggie Acne

As I mentioned in [another recent video](#), Rosco has a little skin infection on his belly. We have a pond in our front yard which by this time each year is more like a cesspool. We call it The Swamp. And all summer long, my dogs play in this pond. Rosco, in particular, is obsessive about swimming in it. He emerges from his swims a bit green and grungy from all the stuff his skin has collected from The Swamp. Inevitably, he ends up with a little secondary skin infection on his tummy.

All my dogs wind up with the same little infection — these black spots you can see here on Rosco's underside. Think of these small eruptions on dogs, especially if they appear during the warm and humid summer months, as the equivalent of human acne.

If I were to culture one of these spots, which I'm not going to because I already know what they are, I would probably find they are Rosco's own natural bacteria that has grown a bit beyond what's normal. When Rosco comes out of The Swamp every day, he comes up to the house and we rinse him off. He gets bathed, of course, but not every day.

What happens is despite the rinsing, some of the gunk from that disgusting pond clings to his skin, irritates it, and he develops a minor secondary skin infection. But you'll notice I'm not panicked about this because I'm very familiar with it. I'm going to disinfect it (which I demonstrated in the skin infection video linked above), I'm going to keep it clean, and I'll keep a watchful eye on it.

This type of infection is a yearly event with my dogs, so I'm not nervous about it. I just want to stay on top of it to make sure the dogs are comfortable and the doggie acne isn't spreading or becoming angry looking.

Washing Neck-to-Toe

I'm going to wash right down to Rosco's paws. As you can see, my daughter did a nice job painting his toenails. I'm very thankful dogs only see in black and white, because Rosco would be appalled to know his toenails are pink. Rosco has a little obsessive-compulsive issue with his feet. He likes to lick his nail beds, and he'll lick to the point of inducing a little yeast infection around his toenails.

So I make it a point to disinfect his paws when he's in the tub. And I wash his armpits, and up under his neck. I make sure to go over that bumpy belly and also do a little exfoliating to wash the dead skin away. Then I move on to his bottom, groin and back feet.

Here's Something I Do NOT Recommend at Bath Time

Professional dog groomers are taught in grooming school to express the anal glands of dogs during bathing. They're taught to do it right along with other grooming steps like brushing teeth and trimming nails. And many DVMs, me included, were taught in veterinary school to express the anal glands to create 'clients for life.' If a dog's anal sacs are manually expressed (emptied, in other words), they lose the ability to empty on their own, as nature intended.

So I'm not a big fan of expressing anal glands just for the heck of it. It's like taking a laxative when you're not constipated – there's no point, and eventually, those organs you're 'helping along' will no longer do their job effectively. If there's a problem with your dog's anal sacs, I strongly recommend you work with your vet not only to solve the immediate problem, but to find the reason the glands aren't expressing normally when your dog has a bowel movement, and to re-establish anal gland tone.

So I'm going to leave Rosco's anal glands alone, and while he has no idea what I'm talking about right now, I'm sure he'll be thrilled to know I won't be squeezing his butt during his bath.

Rinsing and Face Cleaning

It's really important to rinse all the soap and residue off your dog, which can take some time with a long or densely coated animal. Shampoo that dries on your dog's coat or skin can be irritating, and it will also get dirty and matted in a hurry. So take your time and make sure you've rinsed thoroughly.

If for some reason you need to lather your dog's head between the ears, you'll want to tilt the head back to rinse like I'm doing with Rosco, and make sure the shampoo runs backward over the neck and not down into the eyes. Now that I've thoroughly rinsed Rosco, I'll get my washcloth wet to clean his face while he's still in the tub. >Rosco doesn't have the problem, but many, many dogs have something called furunculosis, which is a low-grade skin infection on the chin.

Furunculosis looks like little pimples. The hair follicles get inflamed and red bumps pop out. If your dog has this condition, you'll need to use a disinfectant or shampoo and lather up the chin right here where I'm pointing on Rosco. Since Rosco doesn't have any problems with the skin on his face, I'm just going to use my wet washcloth to wipe away any debris that has collected in his facial folds. Also any allergens — ragweeds, grasses, pollens and molds.

Now I'm going to sort of wring him out, grab a towel, and move Rosco to the grooming table.

A Word About Blow Drying

I'm drying Rosco off with a towel, and since his hair is so short and it's a comfortable temperature in here, there's no need to blow him dry. If your dog is brand new to baths, I don't recommend you try both bathing and blow-drying at the same time. I suggest you towel your dog dry, making sure to keep her warm, especially in the colder months. It's easy for dogs to get chilled when their skin and fur is wet. Don't let your dog get to the point of trembling.

After she's used to baths, you can add a blow-dry. Or if you have a very easygoing dog, you can give it a try after that first bath and see how she reacts. Remember to keep the setting on low heat. And if your pup gets nervous or anxious, you should stop. The goal is to create a positive bathing experience, since this is something you'll be doing for your pet for the rest of her life. The calmer she is with the process, the easier it will be on both of you.

I'd say Rosco's impression of bath time is that it's not overwhelmingly negative — just sort of neutral and a bit strange. He's not loving his bath like he loves, say, playing in The Swamp – but he's not fearful or having a terrible experience. As far as frequency of baths, I recommend you bathe your dog whenever she's dirty, stinky and/ or has skin allergies or a minor skin infection.

Cleaning Tear Staining With Colloidal Silver

Rosco is a Boston terrier, which means he's a brachycephalic breed, which means he has sort of a smashed in nose and bulging eyes. The way his eyes seat in the sockets means he produces more tears than the average dog. The tears lubricate the corneas, but they also spill over and create staining in the creases of his little face.

Anything you use to clean your dog's face must be safe around the eyes. I'm going to clean Rosco's stained facial folds with colloidal silver, which is completely safe for eyes. You can buy colloidal silver at any health food store. Mine is in spray form, but it also comes in liquid dropper form, which is fine.

So I'm going to apply a little of the colloidal silver on a cotton ball and wipe down those facial folds to remove salt, tears, and eye crud. This is a great way to disinfect your dog's face without chemicals or potentially dangerous medications. Some people think it's okay to use hydrogen peroxide on the face, but hydrogen peroxide isn't something you want around or in your dog's eyes. Colloidal silver is entirely safe and an effective disinfectant.

Finishing Up With Ear Cleaning

Now I'm removing the cotton I put in Rosco's ears before I bathed him, to keep water and shampoo out of his ear canals. I check Rosco's ears for dirt about every other day. He doesn't produce a lot of earwax, but many dogs do. The rule is to clean your dog's ears when they're dirty. If they produce plenty of wax every day, then they'll need to be cleaned every day. If they don't produce a lot of wax or collect much gunk, you can clean them less often.

If you leave wax or debris in your dog's ear canal, it's the foundation for infection. Since Rosco doesn't produce a lot of wax, I clean his ears about once a month in the winter and once a week during the summer. You can either put the ear cleaner directly down into your dog's ear (as long as the directions say it's safe), or you can apply it to cotton balls and then swab out the wax and debris that way.

If you pour or squirt the solution directly into the ear, before your dog can shake his head you'll want to massage it in so it thoroughly coats the inside of the ear. Then you'll follow the swabbing procedure I'm about to describe, except using clean dry cotton balls. Rosco, like many dogs, doesn't care for the direct pour into the ears. He shakes his head, paws at his ears, and generally lets me know he's not happy.

So I'm going to apply the cleaner to cotton balls — as many cotton balls as it takes to get the ears swabbed and wind up with a clean cotton ball. Depending on the dog, you may need four cotton balls for one ear and nine for the other. The next day, you may need six cotton balls for the right ear and four for the left. The day after that you may need two for each ear, and so on.

It's nearly impossible to put a cotton ball too far into your dog's ear, so there's no real danger of rupturing an eardrum or hurting or irritating the ear. So I'm going to sort of swab the cotton ball around in there and remove it. There's some debris, so I'm going to continue swabbing until I remove a clean cotton ball. This isn't the only way to clean a dog's ears, but I have found it's the method that is least stressful for them.

You can substitute gauze for cotton balls if you prefer. Gauze can be handy for dogs with bigger ear canals, because it's easier to work your finger around in there with gauze than it is with a cotton ball. The outside, flappy part of your dog's ear is called the pinna. Once you're done swabbing the inside of the ears, use a clean cotton ball to swab and disinfect the pinna of each ear.
