

# Do This Several Times a Week to Slash Your Pet's Bacterial Load

You probably avoid this based on an old wives' tale that completely flies in the face of reality. And your pet is the one that ends up suffering unnecessarily. So do her a big favor — get the current recommendation for this and ease her suffering. She'll lick you in appreciation.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Your pet can be bathed as often as needed, as long as you use an all-natural shampoo designed specifically for dogs and cats
- A good rule of thumb is to bathe your pet when he's smelly, grubby, his coat is greasy or his skin is itchy or irritated
- Choose an organic, herbal, moisturizing pet shampoo, and consider a homemade after-bath rinse to address your pet's coat and skin issues
- There are many things you can do to alleviate your pet's stress at bath time, including brushing before bathing, and protecting her ears and eyes from shampoo and water
- If your pet seems anxious or fearful in the bath, try to enlist a helper to hold her steady and help her feel safe

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Many pet parents still believe the outdated notion that pets shouldn't be bathed too often because it will dry out their skin and coat. And it's true that too many baths and harsh shampoos can cause dry skin.

However, pets with skin conditions (and there are millions) often need baths several times a week to reduce the bacterial load on their skin and reduce irritation and inflammation. A good rule of thumb is to bathe your pet when he needs it, which is when he's stinky, dirty, greasy or itchy and irritated.

Many dogs and kitties with seasonal allergies get significant relief when their itchy paws and skin are rinsed daily or every other day. The fancy name for this is "irrigation therapy." Localized inflamed areas can also be bathed without bathing the whole animal. For example, if your dog has itchy, irritated feet during the spring and summer months, you can set up a foot soak for her. You can also soak itchy, irritated paws in a few inches of cool water in your bathtub or kitchen sink, depending on the size of your dog or cat.

## Pet Shampoos and Rinses

Using a gentle, all-natural shampoo specifically for pets. Human shampoo is pH-balanced for humans, not dogs and cats. And unfortunately, many popular shampoos for both humans and pets contain toxic ingredients, which can be absorbed through the skin into the bloodstream and tissues.

Don't use oatmeal pet shampoos even though there are dozens on the market. Oatmeal may be soothing to the skin, but many animals have grain allergies and are likely to have problems with oatmeal in shampoo. Grain-based shampoos may also feed yeast and bacterial conditions.

Use pet shampoos that are USDA-certified organic, contain no sulfates or harsh chemicals and are specially formulated to soothe, condition, and support your pet's healthy skin and coat. Look for products that contain soothing organic herbal extracts and rich moisturizers. Here are a few homemade healing after-bath rinses you can try:

- **Disinfecting vinegar rinse** — Add 1 cup of vinegar to one gallon of water. Pour over your pet (from the neck down). Massage into skin. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.
- **Deodorizing lemon rinse** (note that applying lemon rinse to dark-coated pets can bleach their fur if they spend time in the sun). Cut one lemon in thin slices and boil in 1 quart of water for 10 minutes. Cover and let stand for about three hours. After shampooing, pour solution over your pet starting at the neck and working toward the tail. Massage the solution into skin, avoiding the eyes. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.
- **Povidone iodine rinse** (note that this iced tea-colored solution will turn white coats to an off-white color). This is a good rinse for hotspots and bumpy or infected skin. Add 1 cup of povidone iodine (also called Betadine or 1% iodine solution) to 1 gallon of water. Pour over pet from the neck back to the tail. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.
- **Herbal tea rinse** for generalized itchiness and restlessness. Add five green, peppermint, chamomile or Tulsi tea bags to 2 quarts of very hot water. Steep for about three hours to allow for the release of the maximum amount of polyphenols into the water. Remove tea bags and pour rinse over pet from the neck down. Massage into skin. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.

## 8 Tips for Stress-Free Pet Bathing

1. **Brush your pet first** — Give your dog or cat thorough brushing right before bath time to remove dirt, debris, dead hair and mats from his coat. Brushing before a bath will make brushing after the bath much easier. If your pet enjoys being brushed, this is also a good way to help relax and soothe him before a bath.
2. **Choose the best spot to bathe your pet** — Since most homes aren't equipped with a raised tub like you see at veterinary clinics and grooming shops, if you have a small dog or a cat, you can use a laundry room or shop sink, or even your kitchen sink. For larger dogs, the bathtub usually works (though it can be hard on your back), or a walk-in shower. If it's a nice day and warm enough that your dog won't get chilled, you can bathe her outside using a garden hose.

Make sure to get bath supplies ready beforehand, including towels and washcloths, a pouring container for water if necessary, shampoo and conditioner, etc. Leaving a wet pet standing alone in a tub or sink while you dash off to get the shampoo you forgot is inviting disaster.

3. **Help your pet feel safe in the tub** — Ensure the water temperature is comfortable, not too hot or cold. Most tub floors feel slippery under pets' paws, so put a towel down on the bottom of the tub so your dog or cat feels more secure during her bath. It can also save you from having to support a larger dog who keeps losing his footing.

If your pet seems anxious or fearful in the bath, try to enlist a helper to hold her steady and help her feel safe. Your helper can soothe your pet and offer her the occasional treat for being a good girl during her bath. The goal is to create a positive experience so she won't develop an extreme dislike or fear of being bathed.

4. **Keep the ears and eyes protected** — Put a cotton ball just inside each of your pet's ears to prevent water from getting in them. Pets don't enjoy having water sprayed or poured on their heads, and it's really not the safest or best way to get the face and ears clean anyway.

Another reason it's not recommended to pour water over your dog's or kitty's head is because she can develop secondary ear infections from moisture getting into the ear canal. It's also not recommended to lather the head, but if you do, hold your pet's chin up and rinse toward the back of the neck, not down over the face.

5. **Lather front-to-back** — Wet your pet's entire body using either with a hose or sprayer, or by filling up a container with water and slowly pouring it over him, saturating the coat and skin. Don't forget to wet all four legs and paws and his undercarriage!

Get your pet as wet as possible before applying shampoo, especially if he has a full or long coat, as it will make lathering and rinsing much easier. If your dog or cat's coat is very thick, you can dilute the shampoo 50/50 with water so it's easier to work into the hair and skin.

6. **Rinse, rinse and rinse some more** — It's extremely important to rinse all the soap and residue off your pet, which can take some time with a long or dense coat. Shampoo that dries on the coat or skin can be irritating, and it will also get dirty and matted in a hurry.

So even though your pet is looking a bit like a drowned rat and is more than ready to be out of the tub, take your time and make sure you've rinsed her thoroughly. Once she's rinsed, use a soft washcloth to clean her face and around her eyes while she's still in the tub. Gently wipe away any gunk that may have collected in her facial folds (if she has them) and under her eyes.

Next you can sort of wring or pat water out of the coat, and then grab a towel and rub her down a bit before lifting her or having her step out of the tub. The second she's out of the tub and free of your grasp, she'll start her very efficient "self-drying shake," so be prepared!

7. **Drying your pet** — Short-haired dogs and cats often just need a bit of toweling and a few shakes to get dry. Pets with longer or dense coats, however, generally need either lots of toweling and/or blow drying. Most pets aren't crazy about the blow dryer, so if yours isn't, towel him dry, making sure to keep him warm, especially in the colder months.
8. **Finish up with ear cleaning** — Now it's time to remove the cotton from your pet's ears and check them for dirt and gunk, which is typically much more of a problem for dogs than kitties. If you need to clean his ears, you can either put the ear cleaner directly down into the 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.

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. Use as many cotton balls as it takes to get to a clean cotton ball from each ear. The outside, floppy 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.

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