

5 Do-It-Yourself Tasks That Help Save on Vet Bills

There are certain things that only your veterinarian can do, but there are others you can handle yourself and save money at the same time. Four homemade healing rinses for itchiness and stubborn skin conditions and at-home hairball management.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are some things only your veterinarian can provide for your pet, but there are also routine pet care tasks that you can perform at home
- The benefits of do-it-yourself pet care are that it's much less expensive, and it reduces the stress your dog or cat experiences during professional appointments
- If your dog or cat develops a skin condition, irrigation therapy (rinsing with water) and frequent bathing can promote healing and provide immediate relief for itchy, irritated skin
- The best way to help your pet avoid oral disease is to brush his teeth every day or several times a week at a minimum
- With patience and practice, you can learn to care for your pet's teeth, ears, nails, and itchy skin at home

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If you're a pet parent, you know there are things only your veterinarian can do for your pet, for example, run diagnostic tests, check organ function, or perform necessary surgery.

But, there are other pet care tasks that can be handled at home. A growing number of dog and cat guardians are choosing the do-it-yourself route when it comes to routine care of their pets.

This approach is not only easier on your bank account, but it also keeps your pet's stress level much lower than it would be if you were shuttling him around town to professional appointments.

5 At-Home Do-It-Yourself Pet Care Tips

1. **Dental care** — Veterinary dental procedures are expensive, especially when tooth extractions are necessary. It's also unnerving for many pet guardians to know their dog or cat need to be anesthetized for the procedure.

And the situation inside your pet's mouth doesn't improve with age. The older the animal, the more likely it is that he or she will have tooth and gum issues.

The best way to help your pet avoid oral disease is to brush his teeth every day or several times a week at a

minimum. If you can develop the habit when your pet is a puppy or kitten, it's typically easier than training an adult dog or cat to accept tooth brushing.

2. **Ear care** — Ear problems are much more common in dogs than cats, but even kitty companions need their ears checked regularly and cleaned as needed.

Some pets are much more prone to ear infections than others. If your dog has a tendency to have problems with her ears, check them daily or every other day at a minimum. Wax or other debris that accumulates in the ear canal is the foundation for infection.

A good rule of thumb is to simply clean your pet's ears when they're dirty. If there's lots of wax accumulating every day, they need to be cleaned every day. If the ears don't produce much wax or collect much crud, you can clean them less often.

If you think your pet might already have an ear infection, it's important to have your veterinarian check him out before you begin a cleaning regimen. Infections often lead to ruptured eardrums, in which case special cleaners and medications will be required.

For taking care of canine ears, some ideal cleaning agents include witch hazel, organic apple cider vinegar mixed with purified water, hydrogen peroxide, green tea infusion, and tea tree oil generously diluted with purified water (for dogs only — never cats).

Use cotton balls only to clean the inside of the ear canal. You can use cotton swabs to clean the outer area of the ear, but never inside the canal, as they can damage the eardrums.

The best method for cleaning a pet's ears is to saturate a cotton ball with cleaning solution and swab out the inside of the ear. Use as many cotton balls as necessary until when you swab, there's no longer any residue on the cotton ball.

3. **Nail trims** — Regularly trimming your dog's or cat's nails has many benefits. Most importantly, it prevents injury to your pet from a nail that catches on something or curls under and digs into her paw.

Nail trims also keep human family members safe from pokes and scratches. In addition, when your pet's nails are short, she's less likely to damage your floors or furniture.

It's important to desensitize a pet who doesn't like having his paws touched before you attempt a nail trim. Equally important is to err on the side of caution when deciding how close to clip the nails.

You don't want to create a painful experience for your pet, because he will forever associate the nail clipper with pain.

4. **Healing baths and rinses** — If your dog or cat develops a skin condition, irrigation therapy (rinsing with water) and frequent bathing can promote healing and provide immediate relief for itchy, irritated skin.

When bathing your dog or cat, avoid oatmeal shampoos. Oatmeal may be a soothing ingredient, but grain-based shampoos are not a good idea for most dogs and cats. In fact, the only pets that truly benefit from oatmeal shampoos are those with poison oak or poison ivy reactions. Use an all-natural organic pet shampoo specifically formulated for dogs or cats. Homemade healing rinses:

- **Disinfecting vinegar rinse** — Add one cup vinegar to one gallon water. Pour over your pet (from the neck down). Massage into skin. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.
- **Deodorizing lemon rinse** — Cut one lemon in thin slices and boil in one quart of water for 10 minutes. Cover and let stand for about three hours. After shampooing, pour solution over your pet (from the neck down) and massage into skin, avoiding the eyes. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.

Please note: Applying lemon rinse to dark-coated pets can bleach their fur if they spend lots of time in the sun.

- **Povidone iodine rinse** (for hotspots and bumpy or infected skin). Add one cup povidone iodine (also called Betadine or 1% iodine solution) to one gallon of water. Pour over pet from the neck down. Do not rinse off. Towel dry.

Please note: This solution is the color of iced tea and will turn white coats to an off-white color.

- **Herbal tea rinse** (for generalized itchiness and restlessness). Add five green, chamomile, or Tulsi tea bags to two quarts of very hot water. Steep for about three hours to allow for the release of the maximum amount of polyphenols into the rinse. Remove tea bags and pour rinse over pet from the neck down. Massage into skin. Do not rinse off.

5. **Hairball prevention** — Long-haired cats, excessively clean short-haired cats, and kitties who like to groom all the other pets in the household are prime candidates for hairballs. Other common causes of trichobezoars (the scientific name for hairballs) are a moisture-deficient diet, or a problem with the GI tract. Do-it-yourself hairball management:

- Feed a moisture-rich, balanced, and species-appropriate diet.
- Add an omega-3 supplement. Sufficient omega-3 fatty acids in your cat's diet can help improve the condition of his skin and fur, as well as the ability of his digestive system to manage the hair and debris he swallows while grooming himself. Never use petroleum jelly or mineral oil for hairballs.
- Brush or comb your cat. Set a goal of four to five minutes a day with a long-haired cat and three to four times a week for a kitty with short hair. You should notice a very quick improvement in the hairball situation, and regular grooming will also help improve the condition of your pet's skin by removing debris and dead cells.
- Add a fiber source to your cat's meals. Mix the contents of a capsule of psyllium seed husk powder with a tablespoon of water and stir it into the food, add a pinch of coconut fiber to each meal, or try a teaspoon of 100% canned pumpkin or freshly cooked mashed pumpkin.
- Add a good quality animal-sourced digestive enzyme to your cat's diet.
- Put a dab of natural (petroleum free) hairball remedy on your fingertip or the tip of your cat's nose. Look for an all-natural product made with slippery elm, marshmallow, or papaya. You can also try organic coconut oil. Your kitty will lick the jelly or oil, swallow it, and it will coat the hairball, allowing it to pass more easily through the GI tract.

Sources and References

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