

Bad Advice for Pet Hair, Almost Never Recommended

The average dog has about 15,000 hairs per square inch — 15 times the density of human hair. No wonder shedding is a problem (even in so-called hypoallergenic breeds). Many factors affect the amount of shedding. There are steps you can take, but please avoid this bad advice.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs have fur coats for a reason, and a normal amount of shedding is natural and necessary
- The healthiest way to control your dog's shedding is to ensure his diet is rich in omega-3 essential fatty acids and an optimal balance of omega-3s to omega-6s
- Shaving your dog's coat is almost never a good approach to managing shedding
- Double-coated breeds should never be shaved unless there's a medical reason to do so, as their undercoats act as an excellent insulator against the summer heat
- If your dog's shedding is a problem in your home, there are many steps you can take to keep it under control

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It won't be long before the weather begins to warm up, ushering in the "season of shedding" for dog parents, many of whom, up to their eyeballs in pet hair, will ask, "What can I do to keep my dog from shedding so much?"

This is a tall order, because the average dog has about 15,000 hairs per square inch, which is 15 times the density of human hair.¹ When you consider the thickness of his coat and the fact that it covers his entire body, the shedding thing is hardly a mystery! The truth is that all dogs shed, including so-called hypoallergenic breeds. Some dogs naturally shed more than others. The time of year, a warm versus cool climate, grooming habits and stress also influence shedding.

Some Amount of Shedding Is Normal, Natural, and Necessary

Your dog's coat serves three main purposes: it regulates her body temperature, protects the skin (her body's largest organ) and helps with sensory perception. There are also three types of dog fur. One is the undercoat some breeds have, which is a layer of soft thick hair that provides insulation. Undercoats are typically found on **dogs bred to live in very cold, wet climates**.

There is the outer coat, also called guard hairs, which are stiff and longer to protect the undercoat and/or the skin from temperature extremes and water. The guard hairs of some breeds (terriers, for example) are so coarse they actually shed water. Finally, there are the whiskers, which are stiff hairs that grow around a dog's face and provide sensory stimulation.

Unlike human hair follicles that can accommodate only one strand of hair, dogs' hair follicles grow several hairs each, which explains the denseness of their coats. The hair follicles contain oil that helps keeps your dog's skin and coat in good condition. When the hairs sprouting from hair follicles stop growing, they are shed to make room for new hair growth. How and when shedding takes place depends on your dog's breed, his overall health and genetics.

Dogs with double coats (for example, **Golden Retrievers**) are considered the heaviest shedders. They typically "blow" their undercoat during the spring and fall. Other breeds like the Dalmatian shed year-round. Bottom line: shedding is a normal and necessary function designed to maintain your dog's coat and skin in healthy condition.

The Best and Overall Healthiest Way to Manage Shedding

Preventing your dog's coat from shedding isn't possible, nor is it desirable for the reasons explained above. However, you can do a lot to manage the amount of hair your dog deposits around your home by ensuring his diet is rich in omega-3 essential fatty acids.

Lack of omega-3s in the diet is a common cause of excessively flakey skin and dry coats in pets, conditions that increase shedding. Dogs need an abundance of omega-3s to be healthy from the inside out. Processed pet food is manufactured at very high temperatures, and since omega-3s are sensitive to heat and light, they're inert by the time they're packaged.

Even if you feed your dog homemade raw meals, if you're not following a recipe that calls for extra essential fatty acids (omega-3s from seafood), his diet is probably lacking fatty acids. The top omega-3 is krill oil, but there's also good improvement in flaky coats when coconut oil (which does not contain measurable omega-3s or omega-6s) is supplemented.

Not only are omega-3s important for your pet, so is the dietary ratio of omega-3s to omega-6s. Most pet foods, whether commercial or homemade, are rich in omega-6s, so adding more in the form of corn, olive, safflower or even flax oil (which contains some vegetable sources of omega-3s, but also omega-6s) can create an imbalance serious enough to cause skin problems.

It's also important to note that your dog's body can't convert omega-3 vegetable sources into DHA. Flax oil has some omega-3 value for humans, but that doesn't hold true for dogs. That's why it's really important to supplement with fish-body oils or krill oil. Algal DHA is also a good source of omega-3 fatty acids.

Other micronutrient deficiencies can also cause flaky skin, including zinc, vitamin E, iodine and tyrosine deficiencies (which can lead to poor thyroid hormone production). There are improvements in skin and coat condition when adequate collagen and vitamin C are supplied in the diet. All these nutrients are naturally found in ancestral diets but are lacking in highly processed commercial pet food.

Another obvious step in controlling shedding is to brush your dog every day, especially during shedding season. Short-coated dogs can benefit from brushing with either a grooming glove or a curry brush.

Also keep in mind that if your dog is stressed for any reason, she'll tend to shed more hair. This can be stress caused by illness, surgery, a visit to the boarding kennel, groomer or veterinarian, moving to a new home, or the addition or loss of a family member (two- or four-legged).

How NOT to Control Your Dog's Shedding

Some owners of heavy shedders decide to shave their dog's coat off during the spring and summer months. This isn't an ideal solution.

Your dog's coat is like the insulation in your home. It works not only to keep her warm in cold weather, but also to protect her from the effects of too much sun. It protects against sunburn and skin cancer. Dogs with thin coats, or white or light-colored coats are especially vulnerable to sun damage. Generally speaking, dogs do best wearing their natural coat, as long as it's maintained in good condition.

One exception would be dogs with recurrent hotspots or other skin conditions. Some of these pets do better with shorter hair because their skin conditions can be managed more effectively. Additionally, some dogs can't clean their private areas very well, so keeping the perianal hair trimmed away is more hygienic for these dogs.

Double-coated breeds should never be shaved unless there's a medical reason to do so, as their undercoats act as an excellent insulator against the summer heat. It seems counterintuitive that an extra layer of fur would help your dog stay cooler, but it does. Air is a natural insulator, and air trapped between the hair follicles and hairs on your dog's body does a very efficient job keeping body temperature in balance.

Having a Dog Means Dealing with Dog Hair

Pet hair here, there and everywhere is a part of life when you share your home with four-legged family members. But the good news is you don't have to resign yourself to living with furry furniture, bedding, rugs or drapes.

A small amount of pet hair around your home is a given, but there are many things you can do to keep the situation under control. This is obviously especially important for people who live in or visit your home who have **allergies to pet hair and dander**.

Sources and References

[Bark Post, How Do I Get My Dog to Shed Less? \(Archived\)](#).

¹ [Bark Post, What's Causing My Dog's Hair Loss? \(Archived\)](#).
