

HOW TO TRIM YOUR DOG'S TOENAILS

▫ Dr. Dawn Ruben
▫ General Practice & Preventative Medicine

OVERVIEW

When you hear the telltale "click-click-click" as your dog walks across the tile floor, you know it's that time again – time to trim the toenails. Trimming your dog's nails is not just a part of grooming; it's important for your pet's health as well. You should remember that untrimmed nails can cause a variety of problems including broken nails, which are painful and can bleed profusely.

While some dogs don't seem to mind when you're trimming their nails, others just plain don't like it. Make trimming time fun and not a struggle. If your pet is not used to having his nails trimmed, start slowly and work up to it gradually. Following these suggestions for a proper nail trim might help you give your dog a more pleasant pedicure.

- Start young. The earlier you start clipping your dog's claws, the better used to it he will be. Frequent trims when your dog is young will help diminish any fear. Have your veterinarian show you how to do it the first time.
- Learn the anatomy. Within the center of each toenail is the blood and nerve supply for the nail called the quick. In clear white nails you can see the quick, a pinkish area in the middle of the nail. Unfortunately, the common black nails do not allow an easy view. Cutting into the quick will result in pain and bleeding. You cannot see the quick on dark colored nails, making them more difficult to trim without cutting into the quick. Cut dark colored nails in several small cuts to reduce the chance of cutting into the quick.
- Use the proper instruments – be sure to use only nail trimmers that are designed for dogs. There are a variety of nail trimmers available at pet stores or your veterinarian's office.

A CLIP OR AN OVERHAUL

Before you start clipping, determine how much needs to be trimmed. The basic rule of thumb is that the nail, which curls downward, should be even with the paw pad. Whatever hangs over must be clipped.

PROCEDURE

- Some dogs will happily sit in your lap or on a table while you trim their nails but many require some form of restraint. You may want to sit on the floor with your pet, hold your pet in your lap, or have someone hold your pet on a table. If your dog has light colored nails, eyeball the quick and aim a few



millimeters away from it. If you cut into the quick, referred to as “quicking,” it will hurt your dog and the nail will bleed.

- Using a nail trimmer for pets, cut the nail below the quick on a 45-degree angle, with the cutting end of the nail clipper toward the end of the nail. In dogs with dark nails, make several small nips with the clippers instead of one larger one. Trim very thin slices off the end of the nail until you see a black dot appear towards the center when you look at it head on. This is the start of the quick that you want to avoid. The good news is that the more diligent you are about trimming, the more the quick will regress into the nail, allowing you to cut shorter each time. Trim nails so that when the animal steps down, nails do not touch the floor.
- Although you will take great care not to hurt your pet, sometimes accidents happen and you will cut into the quick. Have silver nitrate products on hand – you can get them at your veterinarian’s office or pet store. You can also use flour or cornstarch to stop the bleeding. If that doesn’t work, apply a light bandage for about 15 minutes. If the bleeding continues, call your veterinarian.