

TEACH YOUR DOG TO LOVE BATHS!

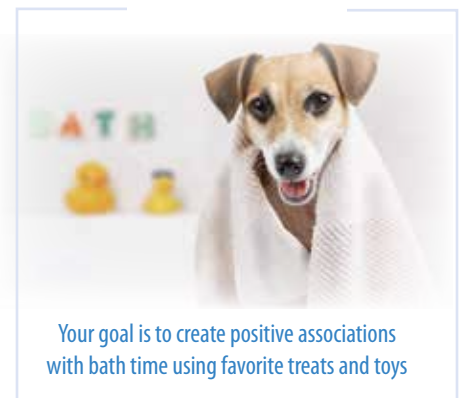


Imagine a bath from a dog's perspective:

- Struggling on the wet, slippery surface to stand upright
- Water temperature that's too hot or too cold
- Water sprayed onto your face and into your ears and eyes without warning
- Being touched in sensitive areas (feet, rear end or ears)

All of these things are uncomfortable, scary and startling. No wonder dogs can have feelings of helplessness and insecurity during baths! Fortunately, you can use classical conditioning to change the way your dog feels about bath time.

1. First, provide your dog stable footing by placing a non-slip mat in your tub or walk-in shower.
2. Next, help your dog get into the tub or shower by making it a positive place. While in there, feed your dog their regular kibble a few pieces at a time. Encourage and reward your dog to get into and out of the tub by creating a trail of kibbles from the floor to the tub.
 - Practice often until your dog happily jumps into the tub when you ask.
 - A happy dog - tail wagging, ears up - does this without hesitation while eating the offered treat. If your dog is stiff, showing the whites of the eyes, panting, trembling or won't eat, keep practicing. Don't proceed to the next step until your dog will happily do this. Be patient, it may take time!
3. Keep your dog happy and its head positioned where you want it - by spreading a soft, tasty treat on the wall of the tub or shower or use a food-dispensing toy that can be filled with a tasty treat and attached to the wall, such as the Sticky Bone from Caitec. Other treats include cream cheese, meat baby food or even canned dog food. Discuss suitable treats for your dog with your veterinarian if there is a medical concern.
4. Fill the tub with lukewarm water until it is touching your dog's feet.
5. If your dog remains comfortable, next use a hose attachment to spray their feet and legs. As long as your dog continues to eat and does not stiffen or shake, you can slowly proceed up the legs to wet the torso.
6. If your dog stops eating the food or acts distressed in any way, stop and go back to the last point that your dog tolerated. For example, if you begin wetting their legs and your dog stops eating, go back to spraying water around their feet. If your dog goes back to eating, wait another minute or so before trying again to spray the water up their legs.
7. Once the dog tolerates the water, pretend to shampoo the dog. Using your fingers, massage your dog's body like you are shampooing them. This way, if your dog begins to get nervous, you can stop immediately if necessary.
8. Touch the feet and toes gently! Many dogs are uncomfortable having their feet handled and require lots of time and desensitization before you can proceed to actual shampooing.
9. If at any time your dog acts hesitant, then your dog still hasn't made a positive association with the process. Go back to the last point of comfort and start again. Be sure to use their favorite foods and toys to create a positive association with the tub and water.
10. If your dog already has a strong dislike or fear of the bath, it can take several days or even weeks to desensitize them to bathing. To help reduce their stress, it is okay to use a combination of tools such as plugging in an Adaptil® diffuser in your bathroom and/or administering anti-anxiety medications (prescribed by your veterinarian).
11. Be patient, this classical conditioning will work! Every time you begin preparing your dog's bath, they should think "Yea! Bath time, I get a yummy treat!" and be eager to jump into the tub.



Your goal is to create positive associations with bath time using favorite treats and toys

How to bathe your dog

1. Before the bath, gently and thoroughly brush and remove all tangles and mats.
2. Use lukewarm water to wet your pet's fur from the neck down.
3. Put a small amount of shampoo on your hand and massage it into your pet's body. Apply the shampoo starting at the back and massage lightly to create a light foam.
4. If you need to wash your dog's face and head, use a wet washcloth.
5. Rinse with lukewarm water from the neck down until the water runs clear.
6. Gently towel-dry your pet and then brush again to remove tangles.

