



BMDCA Info Series

Bernese Mountain Dogs And Grooming/Hygiene

2002 #13

Introduction ► Grooming your BMD provides aesthetic and health benefits for the dog as well as gives both owner and dog a good chance to spend quality time appreciating each other's company. Teaching a puppy how to accept all aspects of grooming is an essential part of early training.

There are as many views on grooming as there are groomers. Approaches to grooming vary widely from "wash, towel and go" to more elaborate routines. Pick and choose from the thoughts offered here and seek suggestions from others, especially your dog's breeder. Keep in mind that grooming requires patience, gentle hands and lots of praise. Treats are great as positive reinforcement. Regardless of the routine you adopt, grooming is a rewarding activity for you and your dog.

The Standard of the Bernese Mountain Dog ►

The AKC breed standard states that "the Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged." Outside of possibly trimming the feet and ears to give them a neat appearance, no trimming is needed.

What Grooming Entails ► A basic grooming routine should provide care for ears, nails, coat and teeth.

Ears: Periodic ear cleaning is very important to prevent infection and fungus growth. It is also important not to get water in the ear canal as moisture can quickly lead to problems. There are many good products available from your vet or pet supply stores for use in ear cleaning. Be sure to follow the directions.

Nails: Regardless of whether a dog is shown in confirmation, competes in a working activity or is a companion, its nails should be kept short. Human nail clippers work well on young puppies. As the dog grows, canine nail clippers will be needed or an electric grinder (such as a Dremel tool with stone attachment) can be used. Many vets and groomers are glad to demonstrate how to trim nails as it makes their jobs easier in handling the dog when the owner trims nails routinely. The frequency for nail cutting is really quite variable. Some dogs' nails grow very quickly while others don't. And some dogs wear their nails down via daily activity and don't require nail trimming at all.

Near the base and inside the dog's nail is tender pink tissue called the quick. The quick is visible inside white nails but not inside black ones. A longer nail will have a longer quick. Try to avoid cutting the quick as it is painful and results in bleeding. As nails are shortened with regular clipping the quick will recede.

If, when clipping nails, a dog's quick is accidentally cut, the resulting bleeding can usually be stopped by applying styptic powder or drawing the dog's nail across a bar of softened soap. One of the advantages of grinding nails is that the process

automatically cauterizes the quick should you grind too far. However, grinders are noisy and care should be taken when introducing them to a dog. As with all aspects of grooming, the regular handling of feet for nail trimming should be introduced when your Berner is still a puppy.

Coat: To keep your dog's coat healthy, it must be kept clean and brushed. Frequency of bathing depends on how quickly your dog gets dirty or has that "doggy" odor. Over bathing can cause as many problems as under bathing. Bernese require less grooming than many other coated breeds as Berner coats easily shed dirt, especially with the help of a little brushing.

There are many types of soap and shampoo – plain, with conditioners, with insecticides, all natural, etc. Consult your dog's breeder for recommendations. Try to use a shampoo formulated for dogs. Read the directions and cautions carefully. Not all products are suitable for puppies.

People bathe dogs in a variety of places – special dog tubs, outside with the hose in good weather, or in the family bathtub with a hand-held showerhead to direct the water. Small puppies can be bathed in a sink, taking extra care not to let them get chilled. Make bathing fun so the dog will find it enjoyable. When bathing your dog be careful not to get soap in the eyes and ears. A cotton ball in each ear before bathing will help. Be thorough in rinsing out the shampoo or the residue may irritate the skin causing hot spots (oozy and irritating sores on the skin). Recurring skin problems should be discussed with your vet.

To dry Berners some owners use a high velocity, forced air dog dryer that literally blows the water out of the coat. Caution should be exercised with human hair dryers as they are much hotter and could burn your dog's skin. Some let the dog "air dry" after toweling. Seasons and weather conditions can affect your choice. Some who live in warm, humid conditions prefer the blower for it greatly speeds up the process. And some dogs are prone to hot spots if their coats are damp for extended periods.

Many dogs are very afraid of the noise and sensation of a high velocity dryer especially when first introduced. On low, start slowly, always being sure to have the dog under control. Never force the situation. If the puppy or dog is fearful take things gradually and introduce the blower over a period of time. Think to reduce the intensity of the airflow by turning down the motor speed or extending the distance between the blower and the dog. Use lots of praise and treats.

Take great care in introducing all grooming aids, the



For more information, please visit our website at www.bmdca.org.

The information provided in this Info Series is reliable but not guaranteed. It is for educational purposes only and the BMDCA assumes no liability for its use. No alterations may be made to this material without permission from the BMDCA and the document must be reproduced in its entirety. Copyright © 2002 BMDCA All Rights Reserved

grooming table, dryer and implements, and always keep the dog's safety as the number one priority. All dogs, but puppies and older dogs especially, need frequent breaks and should be allowed to sit or lie down when tired.

Common grooming tools used by Berner owners include the pin brush, a metal tined dog comb with medium spaced tines, scissors for trimming feet hair and a shedding blade or mat rake for removing dead undercoat. Some people regularly brush dry coats without problems while others suggest that lightly misting the dog with water helps prevent coat damage. Bernese shed a lot and frequent brushing keeps more hair in the brush than about the home.

Coat trimming is minimal as mentioned in the breed standard. Many people prefer the look of a neat foot. Carefully using electric clippers or straight scissors, the excess hair growing between the pads of the feet can be removed. When clipped, the hair on the bottom of the foot will be flush and no hair will extend beyond the pads. This practice may offer some safety benefits by improving traction on a slippery surface and,



in the winter, ice balls will be less likely to form. Also, less dirt will be carried into the home. Feet can be trimmed on a grooming table or with the groomer sitting on the floor with the dog. The same is true for cutting nails.

Some trim the long, stringy hair that grows on the ears. However, this is a very personal preference. Some Berner owners treasure the long ear fuzzies. Using thinning shears or by hand stripping, you can neaten the ear so that its shape is apparent. Choices in thinning shears include single or double-sided models. The models with both sides serrated give a smoother finished appearance. Since many people are initially hesitant to use scissors you might find it helpful to find an



experienced owner/groomer who will give you some one-on-one instruction. While it is best to cut too little than too much, it will always grow back!

If you plan to show your dog in conformation the books on Berners listed in **Info Sheet # 11** are a good initial resource. Even better, go to dog shows and observe Berners being groomed. Ask questions of the owners and handlers but take care not to interfere with their showing schedule. And again, there are as many views on grooming for the conformation ring as there are groomers!

Teeth: Just like humans, a dog's teeth require care. Cleaning teeth is easy and must be done regularly. If you fall down on the job, your dog's teeth may have to be cleaned by your vet and

this might require anesthesia. Canine dental care involves frequent brushing and periodic scaling to remove tartar. If you choose to do minor scaling yourself have your vet demonstrate the proper technique. Dental supplies and tools can be purchased at pet supply stores or ordered through catalogs. And, they should be used in accordance with the instructions.

If dental hygiene is a particular challenge or if your dog tends to get tartar build-up, you might evaluate your feeding program and/or consult with your vet. There are special feeds, treats, enzyme-treated rawhide chews and oral rinses available to help owners keep dogs' teeth in good condition. Some Berner owners give their dogs raw beef marrowbones or raw beef knucklebones as a natural way to maintain those pearly whites. Always introduce new foods slowly to avoid GI upset.

Grooming The Older Dog: Geriatric grooming requires an entirely different set of techniques. (See **Info Sheet #14** on **BMDs and Geriatric Care**)

One More Thing: You should have regular cuddle and massage sessions with your Berner when you rub and feel the dog's entire body and note sores, mats, lumps, swelling, etc. This helps you to identify and treat any problems early in their development. The dogs really appreciate the massage too.

Supplies and Equipment ► So what do you need to get started? Shop around and compare prices, including shipping charges, between pet supply stores and catalogs for they vary and sometimes by quite a bit. Depending upon which approach to grooming that you choose getting outfitted to groom at home might require a sizeable, one-time cash outlay. However, over a fairly short period of time it is less expensive than regular trips to the professional groomer. The items in **italics** will be required even if you don't bathe and trim at home.

- ***Stainless steel pin brush***
- ***Slicker brush that is comfortable for you to hold***
- ***Combs – fine and medium. You may find that a comb with a handle is easier to hold.***
- ***Ear cleaner and cotton balls***
- ***Dental care supplies***
- ***Spray bottles***
- ***Dog nail clipper or grinder – Consider a Dremel Multi Pro Drill with cord and grinding stone for you can use it for other purposes around the house as well.***
- Scissors – Straight and thinning shears
- Clippers – if you prefer to clip the bottom of the foot
- Dog shampoo
- Optional: grooming table (see below), double bolt clamp, arm, noose with safety release and forced air dog dryer (*Metro Air Force Commander* 4HP, 2 speed is well matched for the BMD coat)

Contact Information for Supply Houses ►

- Cherrybrook – 800-524-0820
- Doctors Foster & Smith – 800-562-7169
- J-B Wholesale Pet Supplies Inc. – 800-526-0388
- Jeffers Vet Supply – 1-800-Jeffers
- Pet Edge (was New England Serum Company) – 800-637-3786
- Pet Smart (merged with R.C. Steele) – 800-872-3773
- Sett-R-Rite - 1-800-654-0168 (manufactures top quality grooming tables/accessories that are specially designed for the large dog) www.sett-r-rite.com