GROOMING YOUR CAT

GROOMING

Grooming equipment

- Short, pure bristle brush — to brush shorthaired and longhaired cats.
- Short, flexible, wire bristle brush — to brush shorthaired and longhaired cats.
- Pointed scissors — to deknot longhaired cats and trim hair.
- Cotton buds — to clean ears.
- Cotton wool balls — to clean eyes and control bleeding if nails are cut too short.
- Nail cutters — designed to cut the nails of cats.
- Fine-toothed comb — for general grooming.
- Wide-toothed comb — to comb out knots in longhaired cats.
- Ferric chloride — to control bleeding if nails are cut too short.
- Insecticidal rinse or shampoo — one recommended for cat use.

- Baby shampoo or medicated shampoo — one recommended for cat use.
- Powder — baby powder or flea powder for cats.
- Towel — a suitable drying cloth.

COAT CARE

Cats devote lengthy periods of time to grooming themselves using their tongue and paws. Their tongue is covered with short spikes, which make it a very efficient tool for grooming. Some cats develop a fetish about grooming themselves, and the usual result is loss of hair (bald patches) and abrasion of the skin (see ‘Overgrooming, page 162). It seems that licking their coat and sometimes the coat of other cats is not purely for the purpose of cleaning, but also for some sort of pleasure acquired from this activity.

Cats that are old or sick and some toms do not pay attention to grooming themselves. The grooming of these cats as well as the longhaired breeds needs more attention from owners than does the grooming of shorthaired breeds.

Shorthaired breeds should be brushed gently but firmly and thoroughly twice weekly with a flexible wire bristle brush. The Tex and Sphynx breeds do not require brushing because of their sparse hair cover.
The matting of hair can be prevented by brushing.

Grooming keeps the coat clean, prevents matting of the hair, stimulates circulation and removes loose hair. If the loose hair is not removed by brushing, it often gets caught on the spikes of the cat’s tongue and is swallowed. Loose hair at the back of the throat may cause coughing. In many cases, loose hair is swallowed and accumulates in the stomach in the form of a wad. It may remain in the stomach for weeks or months, stimulating vomiting, especially after eating. The wad of hair in the stomach, if small enough, may pass into the intestine, causing constipation and occasionally a bowel blockage (see ‘Hair ball’, page 171).

Longhaired cats need their coats combed and brushed daily to prevent the hair becoming matted. Mats tend to form around the neck, under the belly, along the sides and in the tail. Cats that are badly neglected can develop matted hair practically all over the body, which looks and feels like a thick dense carpet. Once this happens, these cats are impossible to groom with a brush or comb. Loose hair sometimes catches around the teeth of longhaired cats when grooming themselves, causing gingivitis (inflammation of the gums, see page 153) and an unpleasant odour from the mouth.

**Brushing and combing**

Start grooming your kitten at about three months of age so that it becomes accustomed to the feel of the brush and/or comb. Do not be too vigorous, otherwise the kitten will resent being groomed. Most cats enjoy being brushed and combed, and grooming your cat at an early age makes your task much easier as the cat gets older.

Shorthaired cats should be brushed twice weekly using a brush with flexible wire bristles or short natural bristles. Brush the hair in the direction it falls. Cats often resent having their face brushed. In these cases, wipe the face with a moist cloth. When brushing around the face, be careful not to accidentally damage the eyes.

A short flexible wire bristle brush and a wide-toothed comb should be used for grooming the longhaired cat every day. Longhaired cats should have the hair combed away from the body to remove any small knots, followed by a thorough brushing in the direction that the hair falls. Knots
When a cat's hair is badly matted, it can be shaved. That cannot be combed out may be teased out or broken down by using a pair of pointed scissors, followed by combing. If the knots cannot be teased out or broken down with scissors, then they can be very carefully cut out. To do this, cut a few hairs at a time just under the knot until it is free, otherwise, if you try to cut out the knot impatiently, you may take out a section of skin with the hair.

It is impossible to groom longhaired cats with large areas of badly matted hair. The best method is to get your veterinarian to sedate or in some cases anaesthetise the cat, so that the matted hair can be shaved off with electric clippers.

**Washing**

Cats only require washing if they are dirty, have a skin problem or live in a warm climate where ticks and fleas are prevalent. Some cats hate water, so if you think it will be necessary in the future to wash your cat, it is a good idea to start washing your kitten at about three months of age. The best place to do the washing is in a large laundry tub. Shut the laundry door and place the kitten or cat in an empty tub, holding it by the scruff of the neck. Do not place the cat in a tub full of water or under a jet of water from a tap, because it will become frightened and may be impossible to handle.

Begin by gradually wetting the cat's coat until it is saturated, then apply sufficient cat shampoo to achieve a good foaming lather as you gently massage the shampoo into the coat. Use only shampoos recommended for cats or if unavailable use baby shampoo. Keep holding the cat by the scruff of the neck. Only shampoo the head if it is necessary. Be careful not to get shampoo into the cat's eyes or ears.

Once a good foaming lather is achieved, rinse...
the coat thoroughly and gently with clean water. Using your hand, squeeze the water out of the coat. Lift the cat out of the tub onto a bench and towel-dry it. Some cats will allow the drying process to be completed with a hairdryer. It is important with longhaired cats to comb and brush the hair as it dries, to prevent knots from forming.

**EYE CARE**

Except for those breeds with a flattened face, as found in certain lines of Persians, a healthy cat rarely, if ever, requires its eyes to be cleaned. Longhaired breeds with a flattened face often have tear ducts that are kinked or too narrow and do not allow tears to flow down the duct and out of the nose. Instead, the tears flow out of that corner of the eye closer to the nose, causing a wet stain in the hair on either side of the nose.

Tear staining may also be due to excessive tear production caused by entropion — that is, turning in of the eyelid, with the eyelashes rubbing on the surface of the eyeball (see page 144) — or by conjunctivitis (see page 191). Long hair close to the corner of the eye near the nose can act like a wick. By carefully clipping and keeping the hair short in this area, it will help to keep the area dry and prevent staining.

If tear staining continues, consult your veterinarian, who may flush the tear ducts under a general anaesthetic. If the tear ducts are narrowed or blocked due to the flattened shape of the face, flushing will not improve the situation. Your veterinarian may prescribe an antibiotic (tetracycline), which will eliminate the reddish stain produced by the tears.

If the eyes require cleaning, use a moist cotton wool ball.

**EAR CARE**

Check the inside of the ears regularly for dirt, wax and foreign bodies such as grass seeds. Like humans, some cats produce more wax in their ears than others. Wax is a suitable breeding ground for ear mites (see page 144), bacteria, fungi and yeast. The wax also can irritate the cat and cause partial, temporary deafness if it blocks the ear canal.

If there is no sign of dirt or wax, do not clean the ears, because overzealous cleaning irritates them and sets up an infection.

To clean the ear, place the cat on a table, then take hold of the ear in such a way that you expose the inner side. With a cotton bud moistened in diluted peroxide or in a special cleansing agent obtained from your veterinarian, clean carefully in and around the folds of the ear as well as the opening of the ear canal. Be careful not to push any wax or dirt deeper into the canal, thereby compounding the problem.

If there are signs of the cat scratching its ear, holding its head to one side, redness inside the ear or of discharge in the canal, then seek your veterinarian’s advice.

**NAIL CARE**

Cats wear down their nails during their daily routine by walking, running, hunting and climbing. Some cats wear down the nails of their front paws by deliberately scratching at the base of a tree or some other object, such as a scratching post provided by the owner.

Cats that are sedentary, old or confined inside a carpeted apartment or house should have their nails checked regularly, especially those of the front paws. If the nails are not checked regularly they could grow too long, sometimes growing in the shape of a hook and back into the pad, causing lameness and infection.

The degree of difficulty met in cutting the cat's
If a cat persists in damaging furniture by scratching, consult your veterinarian. In some countries it is legal to declaw cats, provided the owner makes a statutory declaration that the only alternative to declawing is having the cat put to sleep.

**TEETH CARE**

The cat is a predator which uses its canine teeth (fangs) to catch and hold its prey. The incisor (front) teeth are used to tear the flesh off its prey, while the premolar and molar (back) teeth are for chewing the food in preparation for digestion. The cat usually chews the food to reduce it to pieces of a size that can be swallowed.

**Eruption of teeth**

Like humans, the cat has two sets of teeth in a lifetime — namely, the temporary or deciduous set (milk teeth) and the permanent set. The teeth erupt through the gum in pairs; when one incisor appears on one side of the jaw, the corresponding incisor appears on the other side.

Temporary teeth begin erupting between the second and third week after birth, the first to appear being the incisors. By the fourth to sixth week, all temporary teeth except the third molars have erupted. The total number of temporary teeth is twenty-six.

### TIME OF ERUPTION OF TEMPORARY TEETH

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<tr>
<td>Canines</td>
<td>Top Jaw 2</td>
<td>4-6 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molars</td>
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<td>4-6 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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### TIME OF ERUPTION OF PERMANENT TEETH

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<tr>
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<tr>
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The time of eruption of temporary and perma-
Plaque and tartar on teeth.

Gingivitis: inflammation of the gums.

Permanent teeth can help you determine a cat's age up to about seven months. Beyond this stage, unlike the horse, the cat's teeth are of no help in determining age.

Kittens do not appear to have any real discomfort when cutting their temporary or permanent teeth.

**TEETH PROBLEMS**

**Retained temporary teeth**

This is not common in the cat. Occasionally, the permanent canine teeth erupt alongside the temporary canines. The temporary canines remain firmly embedded in the gum, leaving the cat with extra teeth, sometimes referred to as supernumerary teeth. This usually occurs in the upper jaw on both sides. Food collects between the teeth, causing plaque and tartar to form on the teeth and the gum to become infected and inflamed.

If the temporary teeth are still firmly embedded in the gum by the age of six months, see your veterinarian, who will distinguish the temporary teeth from the permanent ones, give the cat a general anaesthetic and then extract the temporary teeth.

**Undershot jaw**

The normal occlusion or bite is one where the upper and lower incisor teeth meet when the mouth is closed.

The common malocclusion is the overshot jaw, the upper jaw being longer than the lower jaw. This is more common in the longhaired, short-faced breeds such as Persians.

**Broken teeth**

The canine teeth, being long, tapered and more exposed, are prone to being chipped or broken. The common causes are fights, falls and being struck by motor vehicles.

If the end of the tooth is chipped or broken, it usually remains healthy. However, the sharp, jagged edge of the tooth may irritate the lip, causing an ulcer. In these cases, the cat is given a general anaesthetic and the end of the tooth is filed to make it round and smooth.

If the fractured tooth becomes discoloured, the pulp cavity is exposed, the gum at the base of the tooth is inflamed or if it is causing the cat discomfort, then the tooth including the root should be extracted under a general anaesthetic.

**Plaque and tartar**

Cats carry large numbers of bacteria in their mouth because they have no oral hygiene and groom themselves by licking their skin and fur. The bacteria develop on food particles in and around the teeth and combine with saliva to form plaque. Plaque is a yellow-brown scum which eventually becomes calcified to form a hard, cement-like mass called tartar. Tartar is found mostly on the outside of the canine, premolar and molar teeth at the junction of the tooth with the gum. Over a period of time, the gum recedes from the tooth; eventually the tooth becomes loose and falls out.

**Signs**

Drooling saliva, bad breath, reluctance to eat hard food, difficulty closing the jaw if tartar build-up is excessive and rubbing the mouth on objects or with a paw.

If you pull the lips back, you will notice a yellow-brown scum or a hard, cement-like brown substance stuck to the canine, premolar and molar teeth at the tooth-gum margin. The odour from the mouth is offensive.

**Treatment**

See your veterinarian, who will give the cat a general anaesthetic, provided it has not eaten or
drunk for eight hours, and will remove the plaque and tartar with an ultrasonic scaler. After the tartar is removed, the teeth are polished to provide a smooth surface, which slows down the reformation of plaque.

The teeth cannot be scaled properly unless the cat is anaesthetised. If the gums are inflamed or infected (gingivitis) they are treated at the same time. After the tartar is removed, the teeth are inspected and any loose, decayed or broken teeth are extracted.

Cavities caused by decay are not common. If a tooth cavity is extensive, extraction is the preferred method, otherwise the cavity can be filled.

Prevention
The cat’s diet should include:
• Dry cat food; its hard, crunchy nature has an abrasive effect on the teeth, helping to remove some of the plaque.
• Strips of meat so that the cat has to chew its food into suitable sized pieces for swallowing.
• Bones with meat on them to encourage chewing. This is likened to a person eating an apple; it has a cleansing effect on the teeth and a massaging effect on the gums. The risk of bones, though only slight, is that they may become caught in the teeth or throat or they may cause a blockage of the intestine if swallowed. Do not offer your cat poultry bones as they could splinter and choke it.

The temperamen of some cats will allow you to clean their teeth using your finger covered with gauze dabbed in bicarbonate of soda. Rub the teeth firmly, concentrating on the area of the tooth near the gum. Some cats may allow you to use a child’s toothbrush. Cats will not tolerate the taste or foaming action of toothpaste.

No matter what you do, eventually the plaque and tartar will build up, so a checkup by your veterinarian every six to twelve months followed by ultrasonic scaling if necessary is the best way to maintain the health of your cat’s teeth and gums.

Excerpted from “The Howell Book of Cat Care”

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