

The Importance of Professional Nail Trims

One of the many services your professional groomer offers is the often dreaded 'nail trim'. I'm not sure who fears nail trims more...owners or the pet! However, there are numerous benefits to regular trims and even things you can do at home to make this a more comfortable procedure for your pet.

First, there are a few dogs out there who do enough digging, running, walking on asphalt, etc...to keep their nails at a natural length. What is a natural length? Preferably, the nails shouldn't click on the floor when your dog or cat walks. But if the structure of the paw allows, the tips of the nails may barely touch...key word: barely.



Most pets on the other hand, need regular nail trims. As professionals, we too often see nails that are incredibly overgrown and neglected. You may think this is only cosmetic, but overgrown nails cause pain, lead to arthritis over time, and can even lead to serious infections.

Let's look a bit closer. Almost every professional groomer has seen the dreaded 'macaroni' nail, a nail so overgrown that it curls as it continues to grow. These nails can often grow back into the toe literally piercing the pad. Once clipped away, these nails often leave open holes that can easily become infected. Your professional groomer will usually refer you to your veterinarian once the nail is removed.

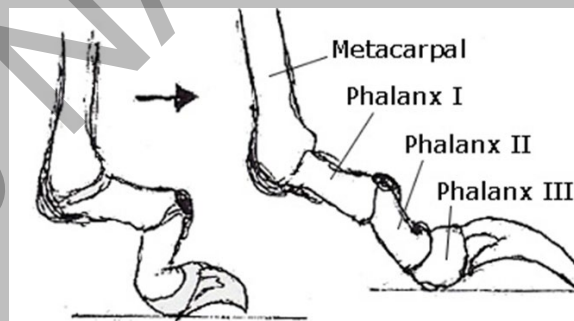
For comparison, imagine walking around with a rock in your shoe every day. Eventually, that rock pierces your foot...but you have no other choice than to walk on that foot anyway. Not a very pleasant thought and one that no pet owner wants their pet to endure.

Sometimes, overgrown nails don't curl, but rather grow forward or off to the side. Don't let this fool you into thinking that things can be procrastinated.





This type of overgrowth is extremely damaging over time. As you can see in the diagram below and the photo above, the phalanges (the bones of the toes) are shifted out of their normal position when the nails become overgrown. This causes joint pain as it shifts the metacarpal (front feet) and or metatarsal (back feet) bones out of place and affects the numerous joints within the foot.



So how often does your pet need a nail trim? That depends on your individual pet. The nails of cats and dogs, just like humans, can grow at different rates. Some pets do fine with a nail trim every 6 weeks while others benefit from a nail trim as often as once a week. Of course, the more frequently the nails are trimmed, the farther the 'quick', a blood vessel with nerves attached, will recede meaning your pet can have shorter nails.



Often when professional groomers are presented with overgrown nails, they cannot be trimmed as short as the owner would like. This is because your professional groomer will not allow themselves to do anything that will be painful to your pet. Bringing your pet in for nail trims between grooms will allow your groomer to trim the nails shorter with time. While some professionals offer walk in service for nail trims, others require an appointment. In my salon, clients on a minimum 6-week schedule receive free nail trims as often as necessary between grooming appointments. Talk to your groomer about what type of schedule would be best for your pet.

Pet owners must understand that even the best professional can sometimes unintentionally quick a nail especially when working with a wiggly, unwilling participant. However, your professional groomer will use this as a guide for trimming the rest of the nails without incident. If this does happen, your professional groomer is equipped with blood clotting powders/sticks that clot the tip of the nail and stop the bleeding.

Much like getting a vaccination, some dogs may yelp when a nail is quicked while others don't flinch at all. Likewise, some nails will bleed profusely in pets who are high strung or very nervous as their blood pressure is higher while others may not bleed at all.

We hear many accusations of careless, cruel groomers whose reputations are damaged tremendously by pet owners who are upset about a bleeding nail after visiting your professional groomer. Please remember that no true professional wants to injure your pet in any way, and a true professional will inform you of any quicked nails. However, sometimes a pet doesn't flinch and there is no bleeding at the salon, so your professional groomer most likely had no idea!

If you retrieve your pet from your professional groomer and there is bleeding from any nails later, first remain calm. No cat or dog is going to bleed to death from a quicked nail...or even numerous quicked nails. If this happens during business hours, contact your professional groomer. If this happens after hours, there are things you can do right from your pantry. Both flour and cornstarch work very well for clotting blood on a quicked nail. Simply pinch a good

amount between your thumb and index finger then press against the end of the nail. Hold this in place for a minute or two and reapply until bleeding stops. Sugar can also be used but does not clot as quickly. Never clean the nail with alcohol or use salt for clotting...both can be quite painful!

Many professional groomers also offer nail filing among their services, often included with the price of the groom. Trimming nails shortens the length, but still leaves a sharp edge to the nail. Filing takes these edges away rounding them and making them smoother...meaning less scratches to you!



One of the best things you can do for your pet is to begin handling the feet as a pup or as young

as possible to desensitization. Hold the paw.... run your fingers between the tops on both the

tops and bottoms of the feet...and don't forget to gently handle the actual toenails as well. Everyone, your professional groomer included, wants your pets grooming procedures to be as comfortable as possible. Even if that procedure is as routine as a nail trim.