

Holistic Grooming

What to look for in your groomer

By Michelle Lonergan

Holistic grooming is the practice of grooming your pet in a stress-free environment in order to provide optimal health for both body and mind.

Starting off on the right paw!



Puppy grooms are critical in developing trust between groomer and puppy. A puppy's first groom should be between three and four months. The first few visits to the groomer should be limited to 30 minutes and should only include a bath with slow introductions to the dryer, clippers and shears. The groomer should allow time to interact with the puppy with lots of positive reinforcement for good behavior. Trust and mutual respect developed early between groomer and puppy provides for a life-long, stress-free relationship.

FOR A HEALTHY BODY:

- Natural products free of harsh chemicals

The most costly expense to a grooming salon is the products used on your dog and cat. Holistic grooming understands that high-quality products are essential for a healthy skin and coat and will not compromise health for cost. Communicate to your holistic groomer any skin sensitivities your pet has and insist on reading the ingredients on the products used. Look for products free of sulfates and artificial fragrances and colorings that can cause dry, itchy skin and/or breakouts.

- Nutritional expertise

Holistic groomers have a strong background and interest in nutrition and will provide you with sound advice on the best diet and supplements specific to your pet. Who sees deeper into the health of your dog's skin, mouth, ears, nails and anal glands more than a groomer? Experienced holistic groomers have a history of seeing many ailments and have seen the successes of recommending tailored diets and supplements to promote a healthier pet. Through proper diet and supplements, you can improve your pet's quality of life with healthier skin and coat, cleaner teeth, reduced ear infections and tear stains, and fewer anal gland issues.

FOR A HEALTHY MIND:

- No cage drying!

Cage dryers are the leading cause of death in grooming salons, yet they are used on over 80% of dogs groomed nationwide. A cage dryer is an automatic coat dryer that hangs on the door of a cage and blows directly on a caged dog. More invasive are the “hot box” cage drying units that include plexi-glass for the cage walls to prevent the blown air from escaping. Most dogs are extremely fearful of cage dryers, as it is very difficult for them to breathe. Lack of fresh air causes labored breathing and rapid heartbeat, which can lead to a heart attack. Cage dryers cause extreme anxiety, which develops into a lifelong fear of grooming.



Alternatively, a velocity dryer should be used and hand operated so caution can be made in sensitive areas. If your dog has been exposed to a cage dryer and has now developed a fear of grooming, seek out a holistic groomer who can rehabilitate your dog to elevate the fear with a slow introduction to a more humane way of drying.

- Limited stay (1-2 hours)

Many salons have an “assembly line” model that requires you to drop off early and pick up 6-8 hours later. The purpose is to allow bathers to pre-wash your pet and place in cage dryers for long periods of time until the dog is dry. This “hands-off” procedure allows the groomers to knock off more dogs, creating a more profitable business. Holistic salons will take in one dog at a time, with the professional groomer working hands-on from bath to drying to haircut.

- Groomer is stress-free and balanced



Dogs and cats are extremely intuitive to our emotions. They pick up the chemicals we excrete from our bodies created from our own emotions. They know when we exhibit stresses because of anger, frustration or feeling rushed. As a result of their pack mentality, a dog interprets these stresses as “unbalanced” and they begin to lose confidence and trust in us as their pack leader. It is critical that a groomer practice mind-balancing techniques before beginning any groom and maintain this balance throughout the entire groom. Small salons are less stressful for a groomer and will ultimately provide for a less stressful environment for your dog or cat.

Michelle Lonergan is a holistic groomer and owns Tabby & Jack's Pet Supplies and Holistic Grooming in Madison and Fitchburg. She has studied pet nutrition her whole life and is well-known in the Madison area for her expertise in healing dogs and cats with a tailored diet, supplements and natural topicals. She works with many holistic vets in the Madison area to manage a health plan through proper nutrition. If you have questions or comments about this article or need advice on tailoring a diet for your pet, please contact Michelle Lonergan at michelle@tabbyandjacks.com.