



**Good Friends
Animal
Hospital**

**D. Isabel Cole, DVM
Ellen Kuchenbrod, DVM**

Clipping Your Pet's Toenails

Nail trims are an important part of your pet's grooming routine. Long nails are subject to painful breaks or splits. Untrimmed dewclaws can grow into the skin. In dogs, extremely overgrown nails can alter how the dog walks, affecting the back and legs.

Training

Many pets are uncomfortable with having their nails trimmed. With puppies and kittens it's important to teach them that it is not an unpleasant activity. Before attempting a nail trim accustom your pet to having its legs, paws and toes handled. Begin by lightly touching and manipulating your pet's legs and feet. Positively reinforce holding still with food treats or petting. Gradually increase your handling until you are able to slip your fingers in between each toe, flex the nail and put gentle pressure on the paw. If your pet should resist at any time, you may be advancing too quickly with the training process. If this happens, return to a touch that your pet will tolerate, reinforce this behavior and then end the session. Proceed gradually with the training and always finish on a positive note. Many short training sessions are better than a few long ones. Remember to frequently reinforce good behavior.

Once your pet tolerates having its feet touched, you are ready to attempt an actual nail trim. Do this when your pet is relaxed. Only trim one or two nails during the first session. If your pet resists, finish the nail you are working on, hold the paw until your pet settles down and then end the session. Then go back to step one with your training until your pet is comfortable with the procedure. Positively reinforce holding still!

Cutting the Nail

The vein or the "quick" is seen as a pinkish triangle at the base of the nail; however it may not be evident in dark-colored nails. A nerve runs down each side of the vein. If you cut too close to the vein the nerve will be cut first, causing pain! There is more variety between the shape of toenails in dogs than in cats. Some pets' nails grow in a more curved shape, as compared with those growing more parallel to the ground. This may determine how short they may be trimmed. Even a skilled professional can misjudge the depth to which a nail may be trimmed. If the nail should bleed, apply pressure to the nail or place some styptic powder to the end.

If you are unsure, it is better to cut less than more than is necessary!