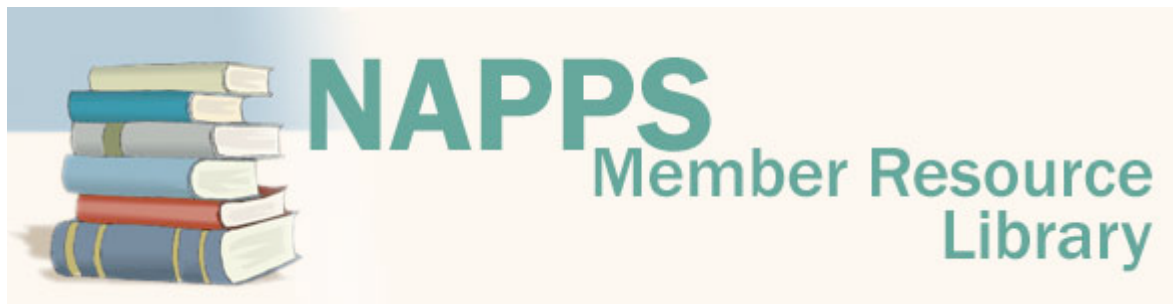




Healthy Skin and Fur

Your pooch may be thick-furred, but she's also thin-skinned. Take these tips to ensure your canine's health isn't only skin-deep. There's more to your dog's coat than the soft or scruffy feel of it. Fur insulates your dog from the elements, protects her skin from injury, and acts as a health indicator. Nutrition, illness, and grooming all affect your pet's coat and skin. Keep your pooch looking and feeling her best by taking stock of these tips.

Her Fur

Breed determines whether your dog is short, medium or longhaired and whether her hair is coarse or fine, and curly or arrow-straight. No matter what her fur's texture is like, all healthy pets should boast glossy, mat-free coats.

Lusterless, brittle coats can indicate illness. You should call your veterinarian if your dog's fur looks dull, breaks easily, or starts falling out excessively, leaving bald spots.

The Skin She's In

Just like our skin, a dog's skin is a sensory and protective organ that helps maintain her body temperature. And although dogs don't sweat like us, the many blood vessels in their skin dilate to cool them off, or constrict to hold in heat and keep them warm. Panting helps release heat too.

A dog's skin is thinner than human skin, and its natural color ranges from pink to light or dark brown to black. When your dog isn't feeling well, her skin may change color or appear dry and patchy. Dry skin is especially common in puppies; it can result from inadequate nutrition, gastrointestinal parasite infections, or sometimes external parasites.

Check your pet's skin by gently separating her fur. Look for anything unusual, including bumps, rashes, or discoloration. Flakes, scabs, odor, or a greasy feel also can indicate a skin problem. If you notice any of these abnormalities, have your veterinarian examine your dog to find the cause.

Also look for fleas or fine, black specks on your pet's skin. This dust is flea waste, will turn red when water is applied to it and is a sure sign your pet has been infested. Fleas make your pet miserable, so if you find fleas or flea dust, take steps to treat her - and her environment - right away. Your veterinarian and his or her staff can provide expert advice on eradicating fleas.

Brushing Up

Grooming your dog makes her even more beautiful and keeps her clean and healthy. Your pet has natural oils on her skin, and regular brushings spread those oils throughout the coat and keep it shiny. Brushing also removes loose dirt from your dog's coat, and it feels great to your furry pal.

Shedding is a year-round event, but you might not notice it until the longer days of spring and summer arrive. Regular brushing keeps the flyaway hairs under control - and off the couch - and prevents matting, which can trap moisture and bacteria next to your pet's skin and cause irritated, itchy patches.

Grooming your pet also gives you a chance to check for lumps, bumps, and sensitive areas. Call your veterinarian if you find anything suspicious.



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