

Nail Clipping

Nail clipping is one of those tasks that some pets don't cope with too well. Not all pets need their nails clipped, but checking the nails regularly is important. A nail that grows too long can cause your pet discomfort, and is more likely to be snagged on things and broken. It can also curl and become ingrown, leading to painful swelling and infection of the paw.

- Some pets require regular nail trimming due to lack of wear on the nail. This can be due to being kept inside or walking only on soft surfaces. Old and arthritic pets may also get less natural wear on their nails.
- Your dog should be able to stand so that his nails are flat on (or just above) the ground, but all of his weight is on his pads. If the nails are too long, his toes will bend and this can be uncomfortable, even painful.
- Dewclaws are the nails that are found up higher on the inside of the front legs. They are like our thumbs. These nails never touch the ground, so with no natural wear, they are more likely to be overgrown and need to be checked regularly. Some dogs have dewclaws on the hind legs as well. These sometimes stick out at funny angles and may need to be surgically removed. Dewclaws on the front legs are normal. They should be trimmed regularly but not removed.
- Many dogs hate having their feet handled and find nail clipping very unpleasant. Unless they are very well behaved, it's usually best to have someone else hold your dog still for you.
- Try to get your pet used to having their nails cut when they are still young. Clip only a few nails at a time so that it is not too stressful for them (or you) and reward them for good behaviour.
- In cats, there's usually no medical need to trim the nails, but long sharp nails are more likely to scratch your furniture and carpet. Cats have retractable claws. When trimming them, you need to press down at the base of the nail first, to extend the claw.
- It's easy to see the pink nail bed in animals that have white nails. You should cut the nails a few millimetres away from this pink tissue, to avoid bleeding. Any black nails can be trimmed to about the same length.
- In pets with all black nails, look for the hollow part under the tip of the nail. Cut away small amounts at a time. Look at the centre of the trimmed surface after each cut. It becomes a lighter grey or white as you near the quick.
- In animals with very long nails, the fleshy part grows down into the nail and it can be more difficult to gauge how much of the nail can be removed. If in doubt, phone us for an appointment and we can clip the nails for a small charge.
- Use good quality, sharp nail clippers that will cut the nail cleanly without crushing or bending. Do not use human fingernail clippers. Human toenail clippers are OK for kittens and small puppies, but not for adult dogs. We recommend sharp clippers with a scissor-like action and curved blades, and we sell these at the hospital. Clippers with a loop and a guillotine-style blade are commonly used but are more likely to bend the nail.
- If you cut the nail too short it will bleed, and is likely to hurt. Don't panic - we cut them too short sometimes too! Simply hold some pressure on it with some cotton wool or clean swabs until the bleeding stops. Some people advise having a styptic pencil handy for this purpose.
- To reduce the need to trim the nails, walk your dog regularly on hard ground, and provide your cat with a scratching post.
- Remember, if you have problems clipping your pet's nails, phone us for an appointment. For a small charge (and no consultation fee) we can clip them for you and/or show you how to do it.

