



# BMDCA Info Series

## Bernese Mountain Dogs And Grooming/Hygiene

2009 #13

**Introduction** ► Grooming your Berner provides aesthetic and health benefits for the dog as well as gives both owner and dog a good chance to spend quality time appreciating each other's company. Teaching a puppy how to accept all aspects of grooming is an essential part of early training.

There are as many views on grooming as there are groomers. Approaches to grooming vary widely from "wash, towel and go" to more elaborate routines. Pick and choose from the thoughts offered here and seek suggestions from others, especially your dog's breeder. Keep in mind that grooming requires patience, gentle hands and lots of praise. Treats are great as positive reinforcement. Regardless of the routine you adopt, grooming is a rewarding activity for you and your dog.

### **The Standard of the Bernese Mountain Dog** ►

The AKC Breed Standard states that "the Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged." Outside of possibly trimming the feet and ears to give them a neat appearance, no trimming is needed.

**What Grooming Entails** ► A basic grooming routine should provide care for ears, nails, coat and teeth.

**Ears:** Periodic ear cleaning is very important to prevent infection and fungus growth. It is also important not to get water in the ear canal, as moisture quickly can lead to problems. There are many good products available from your vet or pet supply stores for use in ear cleaning. Be sure to follow the directions.

**Nails:** Regardless of whether a dog is shown in confirmation, competes in a working activity or is a companion, its nails should be kept short. Human nail clippers work well on young puppies. As the dog grows, canine nail clippers will be needed or an electric grinder (such as a Dremel drill with stone attachment) can be used. Many vets and groomers are glad to demonstrate how to trim nails, for it makes their jobs easier in handling the dog when the owner trims nails routinely and properly. The frequency for nail cutting is quite variable. Some dogs' nails grow very quickly while others don't. Also, some dogs wear their nails down via daily activity and don't require nail trimming at all.

Near the base and inside the dog's nail is tender, pink tissue called the quick. The quick is visible inside white nails but not inside black ones. A longer nail will have a longer quick. Try to avoid cutting the quick as it is painful, and results in bleeding. As nails are shortened with regular clipping the quick will recede.

If a dog's quick is accidentally cut when clipping nails, the resulting bleeding can usually be stopped by applying styptic powder or drawing the dog's nail across a bar of softened soap. One of the advantages of grinding nails is that the process

automatically cauterizes the quick should you grind too far. However, a grinder is noisy, and care should be taken when introducing it to a dog. As with all aspects of grooming, the regular handling of feet for nail trimming should be introduced when your Berner is still a puppy.

**Coat:** To keep your dog's coat healthy, it must be kept clean and brushed. Frequency of bathing depends on how quickly your dog gets dirty or has that "doggy" odor. Excessive bathing can cause as many problems as insufficient bathing. Bernese require less grooming than many other coated breeds as Berner coats easily shed dirt, especially with the help of a little brushing.

There are many types of soap and shampoo – plain, with conditioners, with insecticides, all natural, etc. Consult your dog's breeder for recommendations. Try to use a shampoo formulated for dogs. Read the directions and cautions carefully. Not all products are suitable for puppies.

People bathe dogs in a variety of places – special dog tubs, outside with the hose in good weather, or in the family bathtub with a hand-held showerhead to direct the water. Small puppies can be bathed in a sink, taking extra care not to let them get chilled. Make bathing fun so the dog will find it enjoyable.

When bathing your dog be careful not to get soap in the eyes and ears. Placing a cotton ball in each ear before bathing will help. Be thorough in rinsing out the shampoo, or the residue may irritate the skin, causing hot spots (oozy and irritating sores on the skin). Recurring skin problems should be discussed with your vet.

To dry Berners, some owners use a high-velocity, forced-air dog dryer that literally blows the water out of the coat. Caution should be exercised with human hair dryers as they are much hotter and could burn your dog's skin. Some let the dog "air dry" after toweling. Seasons and conditions can affect your choice. Some who live in warm, humid conditions prefer the blower, for it greatly speeds up the process. And some dogs are prone to hot spots if their coats are damp for extended periods.

Many dogs are very afraid of the noise and sensation of a high-velocity dryer, especially when first introduced. Start slowly, on the low speed, always being sure to have the dog under control. Never force the situation. If the puppy or dog is fearful, take things gradually, and introduce the blower over a period of time. Reduce the intensity of the airflow by turning down the motor speed or extending the distance between the blower and the dog. Use lots of praise and treats.



For more information, please visit our website at [www.bmdca.org](http://www.bmdca.org).

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Take great care in introducing all grooming aids, the grooming table, dryer and implements, and always keep the dog's safety as the number one priority. All dogs, but puppies and older dogs especially, need frequent breaks and should be allowed to sit or lie down when tired.

Common grooming tools used by Berner owners include the pin brush, a metal-tined dog comb with medium spaced tines, scissors for trimming feet hair, and a shedding blade or mat rake for removing dead undercoat. Some people regularly brush dry coats without problems, while others suggest that lightly misting the dog's coat with water prior to brushing helps prevent coat damage. Bernese shed a lot, and frequent brushing keeps more hair in the brush than about the home.

As stated in the BMD Breed Standard, coat trimming is minimal. With respect to the foot, many people prefer a neat foot. Carefully using electric clippers or straight scissors, the excess hair growing between the pads of the feet can be removed. When clipped, the hair on the bottom of the foot would then be flush, and no hair would extend beyond the pads. This



practice can offer some safety benefits by improving traction on a slippery surface, and in the winter ice balls will be less likely to form. Also, less dirt will be carried into the home. Feet can be trimmed on a grooming table or with the groomer sitting on the floor with the dog. The same is true for cutting nails.

Some owners trim the long, stringy hair that grows on the ears. However, this is a very personal preference. Some Berner owners treasure the long ear "fuzzies." Using thinning shears or by hand stripping, you can neaten the ear so that its shape is apparent. Choices in thinning shears include single- or double-sided models. The latter type gives a smoother, finished appearance. Since many people are initially hesitant to use



scissors, you might find it helpful to find someone experienced in grooming, who will give you some one-on-one instruction. While it is better to cut too little than too much, remember that it will always grow back!

If you want more information about grooming in general or grooming for the show ring, consult some of the Berner-specific dog books or go to dog shows and observe Berners being groomed. Ask questions of the owners and handlers, but take care not to interfere with their showing schedule. Again, remember that there are as many views on grooming as there are groomers!

**Teeth:** Like humans, a dog's teeth require care. Cleaning teeth is easy and must be done regularly. If you fall down on the job,

your dog's teeth may have to be cleaned by your vet, and this might require anesthesia. Canine dental care involves frequent brushing and periodic scaling to remove tartar. If you choose to do minor scaling yourself, have your vet demonstrate the proper technique. Dental supplies and tools can be purchased at pet supply stores or ordered through catalogs. They should be used in accordance with the instructions.

If dental hygiene is a particular challenge or if your dog tends to get tartar build-up, you might evaluate your feeding program and/or consult with your vet. There are special feeds, treats, enzyme-treated rawhide chews and oral rinses available to help owners keep dogs' teeth in good condition. Some Berner owners give their dogs raw beef marrowbones or raw beef knucklebones as a natural way to maintain those pearly whites. Always introduce new foods slowly to avoid GI upset.

**Grooming The Older Dog:** Geriatric grooming requires an entirely different set of techniques. (See *Info Sheet – BMDs and Geriatric Care*)

**One More Thing:** You should have regular cuddle and massage sessions with your Berner when you rub and feel the dog's entire body and note sores, mats, lumps, swelling, etc. This helps you to identify and treat any problems early in their development. The dog really appreciates the massage too.

**Supplies and Equipment** ► So what do you need to get started? Before buying anything, shop around and compare prices, including shipping charges, for you will likely find considerable variations. Then, depending upon which approach to grooming that you choose, getting outfitted to groom at home might require a sizeable, one-time cash outlay. However, over a fairly short period of time, it is less expensive than regular trips to the professional groomer. The items in **italics** will be required even if you don't bathe and trim at home.

- *Stainless steel pin brush*
- *Slicker brush that is comfortable for you to hold*
- *Combs – fine and medium (You may find that a comb with a handle is easier to hold.)*
- *Ear cleaner and cotton balls*
- *Dental care supplies*
- *Spray bottles*
- *Dog nail clipper or grinder (Consider a Dremel Multi Pro Drill with cord and grinding stone, for you can use it for other purposes around the house as well.)*
- Scissors – Straight and thinning shears
- Clippers – if you prefer to clip the bottom of the foot
- Dog shampoo
- Optional– grooming table, double bolt clamp, arm, noose with safety release, and forced-air dog dryer (*Metro Air Force Commander 4HP, 2 speed is well matched for the BMD coat*)

**Various Supply House Websites** ►

- Cherrybrook – <http://www.cherrybrook.com/>
- Care-A-Lot Pet Supply – <http://www.carealotpets.com/>
- Doctors Foster & Smith – <http://www.drsfostersmith.com/>
- J-B Wholesale Pet Supplies Inc. – <http://www.jbpet.com/>
- Jeffers Pet – <http://www.jefferspet.com/ssc/>
- Pet Edge – <http://www.petedge.com/>
- Pet Smart – <http://www.petsmart.com/>
- Midwest Grooming Supplies & Service – <http://www.midwestaroominasupplies.com/>