



TO SHAVE OR NOT TO SHAVE?

HOT DOG; HOW YOUR DOG KEEPS COOL

We all know that dogs are more susceptible to the heat than we are. As the temperature rises, dogs use a combination of methods to try to keep cool. This includes reducing their activity, laying on cool surfaces and (to a limited amount) sweating through their footpads. A dog will also pant to help eliminate excess body heat through their mouth. As well, a dog's coat is often a natural protection from the heat, helping to keep the skin cool. *“One cooling mechanism that many people aren't aware of is that dogs dilate the blood vessels in the skin to exchange the warmth of the blood with the cooler surface skin. That's why short coated dogs ... suffer more in the heat.”*¹

An experiment was done one day at a dog show where a thermometer was used to determine the skin temperature of two breeds of dogs; a Doberman Pinscher and a Standard Poodle in full length show coat. It was determined that the skin temperature of the Doberman was several degrees warmer than the Poodle's skin underneath all that show length coat. The long coat of the poodle actually protected it from the warm temperatures, keeping its skin cool while the Doberman's short coat offered little protection from the heat. This goes to show that the dog's coat will often act as a barrier and help insulate the dog from warm weather.

Double coated dog breeds (i.e. Chows, Shepherds, Pomeranians, Malamutes, or most other dogs who “shed their coat out”) are especially lucky to have this layer of insulation. When these breeds of dogs are **combed out** and all their **undercoat removed**, they will actually stay cooler than their short coated canine counterparts (Dobermans, Miniature Pinschers, Greyhounds, etc.)

TO SHAVE OR NOT TO SHAVE – THAT IS THE QUESTION

In the summertime, when the weather starts getting hot and sunny, some dog owners will go to their Groomer complaining that their dog is hot and ask to have the coat shaved off, believing that it will make their dog more comfortable. What many people don't realize is that it may not be the best option or in the best interest of their dog to have the coat shaved off, for several reasons.

Aside from having little protection from the heat, a dog which is shaved down is also more susceptible to sunburn (yes, a dog **will** sunburn!) and clipper rash, especially if they are unaccustomed to being clipped short. *“One mistake dog owners often make ... is to shave the coat of normally longhaired dogs thinking this will make the dog more comfortable. Not true, hair is an insulator and the lack of it overburdens the skin's ability to regulate body temperature ... and can lead to heatstroke.”*² It is best to talk to your Groomer about these facts and then decide what is best for your dog.

Since their coat acts as a natural barrier from the heat, it is especially important that “double coated breeds” (such as Chows, Pomeranians, etc.) **NOT** be shaved off except in extreme circumstances i.e. extreme matting, severe skin problems, etc. Clipping these dog's coats may result in other, often irreversible consequences. One of these is a condition known as Post Clipping Alopecia. (Alopecia is described as a lack of hair or hair loss). This condition is most often seen in double coated and Spitz type breeds (i.e. Pomeranian, Chow, Husky) This *“fairly common condition occurs after an area of hair has been clipped ... There is no known treatment for Post Clipping Alopecia. The loss of hair usually regrows within a year.”*³ The critical word being “usually”! **There have been many instances when the hair never grows back!** Additionally, in some cases, when the hair does grow back, the dog's hair will fail to grow properly or will grow back in patches. Often, after shaving the coat, you will find that all the guard hairs have been ruined and the dog will grow back that thick wooly undercoat which gives little to no protection from the elements.

So, think twice before you request that your dog be shaved off. Above all, regular brushing out of the undercoat is a much better alternative to shaving a double coated dog. Talk to your Groomer about the consequences and alternatives, you may be thankful in the long run!!

¹ Dogs in Canada March 2004 article by Chris Zank, DVM

² Dogworld August 2002

³ Caring for Your Dog by Bruce Vogle, DVM pages 182, 187, 428