

The vets will see you now

LET THE FUR FLY! ANSWERS TO YOUR HAIREST PET QUESTIONS.



Q. Shabby tabby

Why does our older cat get matted-up fur on her back, and what's the fix?

L. J. M., via Facebook

A. Felines are pros at primping, but weight gain or arthritis can make it tough for an older cat to reach her back, resulting in tangled fur that is uncomfortable and can cause skin infections. (Matted fur can also be a sign of diabetes or hyperthyroidism, so it's a good idea to have the problem checked by a vet.) To eliminate clumps, try this two-part plan. Have the mats clipped by a groomer. (This is tricky, since they're so close to the skin.) Then, every few days, run a soft-bristle brush through her fur for three minutes. If she squirms, give her a treat (like a bowl of tuna) as you work, says animal behaviorist Suzanne Hetts: "When cats associate the brushing with something they enjoy, it can help them tolerate it better."

Q.

Seeing red

Our golden retriever gets hot spots in the summer. Why?

B. R., via Facebook

A. Those oozy red wounds are signs of a bacterial skin infection called acute moist dermatitis, which commonly forms from the irritation caused by a flea bite, a cut, or an allergen. When a dog scratches, licks, or chews the itchy area, it creates a moist environment that causes the hot spots to form,

says veterinarian Nancy Kay. To help them heal, use clippers to trim the fur around each spot to air them out. Once a day, gently dab the areas with a gauze pad dipped in a mix of baby shampoo (1 drop) and warm water (1 cup), then rinse with warm water and air-dry, says veterinarian Ann Hohenhaus. Avoiding new hot spots is all about ditching the itching: Ask your vet to prescribe a flea-prevention treatment and test for allergy triggers, like grass and pollen, that can be managed with medication.

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Q.

Along for the ride

I'm taking my high-strung dog on a long road trip. What can I do to make things go smoothly?

S. R. M., via Facebook

A. Practice makes peaceful when it comes to planning a long ride with a jumpy pet. In the weeks leading up to the trip, do trial runs to get the dog used to the car's constricted space. "Start small, even just sitting in the car with her for a few minutes with the door open," says Kay. Reward her with treats or a toy, and work up to short drives to the dog park or some other favorite location. Comfortable seating is key: Kay recommends Pet Ego's Jet Set Forma Frame carrier (\$152, petego.com). On trip day, break up the drive with an hour-long bathroom and exercise break enhanced with a few interactive toys. (Hohenhaus likes the Buster Food Cube; \$15, dog.com.) Still antsy? Soft tunes can calm a canine. "Clients of mine played the CD *Through a Dog's Ear: Driving Edition* [\$18, throughadogsear.com] when they got stuck in a ton of traffic," says Hohenhaus. "They were ready to kill each other, but their dog was very Zen."