

# Grooming Requirements & Equipment

By Rita Riordan

Your new Cavalier comes to you with grooming requirements. Cavaliers are one of those breeds that require daily grooming to keep their skin and coat in great health. So assemble your grooming tools and begin this daily activity that will contribute to the growing bond between you and your fur baby. When you buy your tools, do not buy the cheapest you can find. They won't last and will damage your dog's coat. Most median priced grooming tools will be adequate for pet grooming. If you have dreams of showing someday, go for the pricier lines.

## Grooming Tools:



- A pin brush and a bristle brush (can be one double-sided or 2 separate tools)



- A comb with pivoting/rotating teeth



- Three sturdy combs with fine, medium, and wide teeth (Greyhound combs are super)



- A 1 or 2 row coat rake



- Claw clippers

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- Thinning scissors (these have one blade that looks like a shallow-tooth)



- Short blade ball-tipped scissors (you can use the rounded tip cuticle scissors)

- Vaseline or other non-medicated petroleum jelly
- Coarse terrycloth washcloths (discount stores often sell these cheaply in bundles)
- High protein dog shampoo (do not use human shampoo, as the Ph levels are wrong)
- Bath sheet or beach towel

## You may wish to include the following in your grooming kit:



- Bag Balm (very safe Vaseline-like topical ointment)

- Fur conditioner (Cowboy Magic, Oakwood, "The Stuff", or Mane 'n' Tailwork well)
- Apple cider vinegar (dilute with water – 1 part vinegar to 3 parts water -- for ear cleaning)
- Clippers with comb attachments
- Cornstarch or Quickstop (to stop blood on those rare claw clips that are too close to the quick)
- Baking soda (alternative to canine toothpaste)
- Dog toothbrush (you can, alternatively, use a washcloth or your fingers to clean your dog's teeth)
- Baby's hairbrush (very soft bristles)
- Baby body wash

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## Daily Grooming Routine:

Let's move from your dog's top to bottom, front to back for this discussion. Using a washcloth or a baby's hairbrush, gently go over your dog's face and muzzle to gather up loose hairs. Use a separate, clean washcloth to clean the areas around your dog's eyes. Use your ball-tipped scissors to clip any longish whisker-like hairs that are around your dog's eye area.

Check your dog's nose. If it appears to be dry, apply a very small dab of Vaseline.

You may want to reserve cleaning your dog's teeth and gums until you've finished all the other daily grooming actions. You can safely mix baking soda with water to use as a tooth cleaner on a dog toothbrush or on a corner of yet another rough washcloth (now you know why it's wise to buy them by the bundle!) Alternatively, you can use dog toothpaste. We'll address this process in detail at the end of the daily grooming routine.

Clean the underside of your dog's ears using a dampened clean washcloth. You can use the diluted apple cider vinegar, diluted baby body wash, or just plain water to dampen that washcloth. Clean gently around the ear opening. If there are long hairs on the underside of the ear leathers, you may wish to clip those shorter using the ball-tipped scissors.

Using the pivot tooth comb held at a 45 degree angle to the dog's ears, gently comb the fur on the top of the ears in short strokes. You can use this same comb held at the same angle to comb the chest fur and front leg feathers. Avoid using the comb for the dog's legs; legs and tops of paws can be done using a bristle brush or the baby hairbrush.

**Tip:** In winter indoor dryness, hair and fur brushes seem to exacerbate static. Spritz the top of the bristles with a fine mist of water or a mixture of water and coat conditioner to keep down the static.

Examine your dog's paw pads and the skin between each digit. If the paw pads are cracked and/or dry, dab a bit of Vaseline or Bag Balm on each pad and massage that into the hide. Any lumps or wounds on the skin between the digits, both top and bottom, need vet attention. Clean the bottom of your dog's paws with the washcloth. Use the ball-tipped scissors to clip fur between the pads and keep this fur growth relatively short.

Now address the fur on your dog's back, sides, and belly. Use a medium tooth comb or the pivot tooth comb, again held at an angle. Hold the dog's skin firmly behind its skull, and use long strokes from neck to base of tail down the dog's back. If this isn't gathering up fur, use the coat rake in the same manner. Gently comb the dog's shoulders and sides using the same tools. When you've finished combing, run your

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fingers slowly over all parts of your dog's body. You may use the comb to gently part the hair and examine the skin on the dog's chest, back, and sides. Check for lumps, any tenderness, dandruff or short coarse hair areas. Note those to bring to the vet's attention.

Our Cavaliers have fur "chaps" (feathering) on their back legs. Comb through these gently; you won't need the coat rake on the chaps.

If your dog's tail is relatively tangle free, use a brush on the tail hairs. Alternatively, you can use the comb, but don't tug to get through snarls. Work through snarls using short, gentle strokes with the comb. Work from the outside edge of the snarl, slowly detangling, until you get to the skin.

Do the same procedures on the dog's back legs and paws as you did on the front.

Use a washcloth to clean your dog's rectal area. If you notice any irritation in that area, apply a dab of Vaseline or Bag Balm; persistent external rectal irritation needs vet attention. The same process should be done on female vulva areas and male penis areas.

Gently brush your dog's underside. Note the condition of the dog's nipples.

Now we can address those teeth! Here are a vet technician's recommendations for this process:

## Canine Tooth Brushing:

Canine tooth brushing is very similar to how you brush human teeth. To introduce your dog to the daily ritual of canine teeth cleaning, it is best to step them into it. The entire job should take no more than 30 seconds and will go a long way toward prevention. Your dog's teeth should be brushed between 2 to 7 times per week. We prefer daily brushing. Steps for brushing are:

1. **Start fresh** – This means have your veterinarian do a thorough teeth cleaning.
2. **Taste** – Use specially formulated toothpaste for dogs, available in multiple flavors – beef, poultry, and malt flavor is both popular and yummy – from most veterinarians. To familiarize your dog with the toothpaste, have your dog taste a small amount. Another option for canine tooth brushing is to introduce the brush first. Try using the brush without paste 2x a day for two weeks. Once your dog is comfortable with the brush, add toothpaste.

Do not use human toothpaste. Unlike ourselves, human toothpaste requires someone to spit it out. Unless your dog can spit on command (which would be a neat trick), avoid it.

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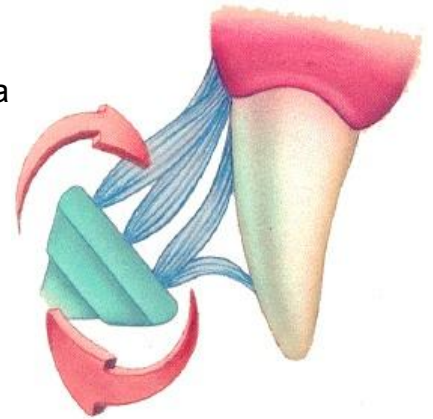
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3. **Touch** – The next time, have your dog taste the toothpaste and then run your finger along his upper gums. Give your dog a treat or some loving afterward. Use gauze or a nylon stocking around one finger to get them used to the idea of brushing. Try not to go longer than a minute.
4. **Brush the upper teeth** – Get a soft toothbrush with bristles and use along the gum line instead of your finger. Use circular motions with the brush from back to front along the gum line. Hold the brush at a 45° angle (slightly tilted). You can use a soft human child's brush or one made for dogs. For many dogs a child's toothbrush is still too hard, so stick to one made for dogs. They also sell brushes that fit onto the index finger.

An alternative to a brush is your finger. Wrap a cloth around a finger, put a bit of paste on the end, lift the dog's lips, and rub in a circular motion along the teeth and gums. Focus on the outside of the teeth as your dog's tongue does a pretty good job inside.

Canine tooth brushing should use 10 up and down motions, covering 3 to 4 teeth at a time.

5. **Brush all the teeth** – Always start with the upper since these are more vulnerable to plaque. After the top, go ahead and brush the bottoms. Put the toothpaste between the bristles instead of on top of the bristles. This will allow more of the toothpaste to come in contact with the teeth.



Tip: Make your canine tooth brushing routine part of your own. Let your dog see you brush before you brush theirs. They will see it is a normal part of what your dog's best friend (you) does.

## Bleeding Gums after Canine Tooth Brushing

If you see bleeding after canine tooth brushing there may be some periodontal disease. Brushing tightens the gums and bleeding should stop. If it does not, see a veterinarian.

## Homemade Dog Toothpaste

You can make toothpaste at home using one tablespoon baking soda with one teaspoon of water.

## Weekly Grooming Routine:

Typically, claw trimming is something you can do once a week vs. daily. Before you start addressing those claws, it might be a good idea to mix a small amount (1/2 tsp.) of cornstarch with enough water to make a paste. You can also buy QuickStop from your local pet supply store. You can use either of these to stop any bleeding that might happen (oops!)

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Your dog's nails should just touch the ground when s/he walks. If the nails are clicking on the floor or getting snagged in the carpet, it's time for a pedicure.

Start at the tip of the nail and snip a little at a time. Look at the cut edge of the nail. When you start to see pale pink tissue near the top of the cut edge (the quick), stop. Be extra careful when cutting dark nails, because the quick is difficult to see. You can use a nail file to smooth the edges further.



If the tip of the nail begins to bleed, apply the corn starch paste and pressure using a washcloth, paper towel, or gauze pad. Avoid wiping the blood clot off the tip of the nail once the bleeding has stopped. Do not be too concerned if you nick the quick. As the old time breeders used to say "No dog ever died of hemorrhage of the toenail". It's unpleasant for you and your dog, but not life threatening. Remember to trim the dewclaw nail on the inside of the leg. Since it doesn't touch the ground, it wears down less rapidly than the others and can actually grow into the flesh behind it.

## Bathing:

Do not bathe your dog more than once a week, preferably only once a month so as not to dry out the skin and hair. Set out your shampoos, conditioners, and at least two big fluffy towels. Bathe him/her in a relatively large sink. The kitchen sink is a good choice, as most have a spray faucet and a height which is easier on the back. Do NOT use a human shampoo; the pH balance is all wrong. Buy a high end shampoo (Isle of Dogs is good) at a dog supply shop or on-line. "The Stuff" is a good conditioner, but there are many other dog conditioners that are equally good.



Wet the dog thoroughly. Then from the back of the head down the spine to about the middle of the tail apply a line of shampoo. Rub or massage the shampoo into the coat. Don't worry if you don't get a lot of suds. You're going to do this twice and you'll get plenty of suds the second time. Leave the shampoo in the coat while you soap up the ears. You may use Dawn dishwashing soap on the ears, but only the ears, to cut the oils and make them fluffy. Wash each ear thoroughly, being careful not to get the soap in the dogs' eyes. You will only need to wash the ears once if you really get them clean the first time.



Rinse your dog thoroughly and then repeat the soap step again. Soap up the body coat and feathering really well the second time. Be sure to get the chest, stomach, and "private parts" clean too. Wash the feet and between the toes. Now rinse again, being sure to get absolutely all the soap out of the coat and include a second rinse of the ears. Now apply the coat conditioner as directed. Let it sit on the coat as you

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give your dog yet another massage. Dogs love the bathing process because of all the massaging! Now rinse out the conditioner. Even if the directions say you can leave it on the coat, don't. If left in the coat, the conditioner will only attract dirt and another bath will be needed sooner. Before lifting your dog out of the sink, squeeze the ears, tail, body, and legs to get more water off. Now, throw one of those nice thick absorbent towels over the dog, wrap the towel around the dog, and lift the dog out of the sink onto a flat surface. Briskly towel the dog dry - as best you can. If you need two or three towels, that's ok. If your Cavalier has a rough or wavy coat you may want to try a drying coat.



A drying coat is made of a light-weight spandex type of material and keeps the hair flat and in place while the dog is drying. Put the dog, in his/her drying coat in a wire crate. Place a towel on the bottom and hang a towel/s over three of the four crate sides. This will allow warm air to escape, but still keep most of the warm air circulating around your dog. Lodge the nozzle of a hair drier between the wires on the front of the crate (this may take a bit of ingenuity, but it can be done) and turn it on cool but full power. Now go get yourself a

cup of coffee and a good book to read for an hour or so. When you come back your dog should just be slightly damp. Put your dog back on that flat surface, take off the drying coat, and start combing and blow drying. Do this while the dog is damp and your dog will have a straighter, flatter coat. Your biggest challenge is the ears. All I can say is keep blowing and combing. And when you think you have them dry, take a break and then go back to them, because they probably weren't dry! Good luck and enjoy your nice clean, shiny dog!