

Nail Clipping



Some dogs keep their nails worn short by walking on hard surfaces like cement sidewalks. Other dogs need their nails trimmed. Many dogs learn to dislike this procedure. Help prevent nail clipping panic with this programme.



You will need:

- 1) Buckets of patience, perhaps also some calming music for the dog lover's soul. This should be a relaxing exercise for both of you!
- 2) Good eye sight.
- 3) Super-yummy treats.
- 4) A box of wooden toothpicks or matchsticks.
- 5) Good quality, sharp nail clippers that do not crush the nail.
- 6) Your curious and hungry dog.
- 7) Styptic powder or baking powder, in case it goes wrong.

We can clip nails in two ways, The Quick Way, and the Confident Clipper Game.

The Golden Rule for nail clipping (and other handling or grooming) is:

NEVER FORCE OR RESTRAIN

If you do, you break the trust and the dog will be even more reluctant next time.

1. The Quick Way: THE "NOW!-AND-STOP!-ROUTINE" - Needs 2 people

NOT FOR DOGS THAT ARE TOO FEARFUL OF HANDLING EVEN WHEN THERE IS GREAT FOOD AROUND.

This exercise requires TWO PEOPLE that communicate well with each other. It can be used when the dog really needs his nails clipped *today*, ie. we don't have time for the Confident Clipper Game (as described on the next page). Person #1 is the one in charge and manages the treats. Person #2 is the one that clips the nails.

In order to make sure that your timing is right, start practicing this exercise WITHOUT the nail clippers. Instead, practice touching the dog's shoulder or other body part that the dog is relaxed about having touched. Relaxed = dog does not turn head away and does not lean away from the touch. Person #1 has a handful of extra special yummy treats in her hand behind her back, and then this happens:

1. Person #1 holds the treats to the dog's mouth, so that he can nibble them, and says "Now!".
2. Upon hearing the word "Now!", Person #2 touches the dog's shoulder.
3. Before Person #1 runs out of treats, Person #1 says "Stop!".
4. Immediately upon hearing the word "Stop!", Person #2 removes her hand.
5. Once Person #2 has removed her hand, Person #1 removes the hand with treats.

Practice this exercise until your coordination is impeccable, i.e. there is never a hand on the dog without treats on the mouth. If the dog allows Person #2 to touch the lifted paw with the nail clippers, then she can clip a nail. Only clip one nail at a time, then take a break.

The reason that Person #1 is in charge is so that she can say "Stop!", causing Person #2 to stop clipping before the food in the hand runs out.

2. The Permanent Solution: THE CONFIDENT CLIPPER GAME - Needs only 1 person

In this protocol, one person can do all the work, but it will take a bit more training. Sit down with your dog in a comfortable place. Play some calming music in the background.

1. Start on a part of your dog's body that he is relaxed about having touched, for example the shoulder. "Relaxed" means that he does not turn his head away, leans away or avoids. Then:
 - a) Hold five high-value treats in your treat hand behind your back.
 - b) Touch the comfortable body part with your other hand and hold it there.
 - c) Give a treat with your treat hand.
 - d) Take both hands away.Gradually work your hand closer to the paw, one inch at a time, but only progress when your dog is totally relaxed. NEVER FORCE - if you do, you break the trust. Your dog needs to be able to trust that you will let him pull away *at any time* and you will then stop what you are doing.
2. Once your dog is happy with having his paw touched by your hand, touch with the nail clippers. The paw is still on the floor. Let your dog see and smell the clippers. If your dog does not like the nail clippers, go back to step 1 and hold the nail clippers in your hand during touches.
3. Put away the nail clippers again and ask your dog if you may lift the paw. You ask him by putting light pressure on the back of his wrist and see if he will let you lift it. You still hold the treats behind your back. As soon as the paw lifts, support the paw without restraining it (all fingers BELOW the paw, none on top) and give the treat, then remove both hands. If your dog pulls the paw away, go back to #2 for a while.
4. Once #3 is fluent, progress to lightly let your treat hand touch the lifted paw on its way to deliver the treat to your dog's mouth. This is to teach your dog to be comfortable with two hands, as nail clipping does require two hands.
5. When #4 is fluent, do the same with the nail clippers instead of just the treat hand. This means you will need to keep the treats in your pocket or on a table until after you have touched the paw with the nail clippers.
6. Have toothpicks in one pocket, food treats in another. Let your dog see and smell the clippers. Then take out a matchstick and clip a piece of wood off of it to make the clipping sound. Immediately give the dog a treat. "Clip!" predicts treat! Repeat x4, then take a brief break. If your dog shows concern, clip from a distance. Follow each clip with a yummy treat. Practice until your dog is totally relaxed about the clipping sound. Oh, and be sure to retrieve all the little pieces of wood so that they do not end up in your dog's mouth!
7. Without using the nail clippers, hold a toothpick in the hand that is supporting your dog's paw, then treat from the counter or your treat pouch as before.
8. As #7, but touch one (and only one) of the dog's nails with the nail clippers, then give treat.
9. As #8, but clip the toothpick and give the treat.
10. As #9, but grab one (and only one) of the dog's nails with the nail clippers, then let go without clipping and instead clip the toothpick, and give the treat.
11. Only do this occasionally at first: as #10, but clip one (and only one) of the dog's nails with the nail clippers and give the treat. Clip only a sliver off the nail.

If any training step is not working, go back and spend more time on the previous step. Also remember that there is no law that says that you have to clip all the nails in one sitting! ☺

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE "QUICK"

If the dog has white nails, you can see where the vein ("the quick") ends. Black nails are more of a guessing game. To avoid guessing, take off only the tip, where the nail is clearly curving, well beyond the quick. If the dog pulls away, remember to let go and do not resist him. Never force.

If you do make the dog's nail bleed:

- a) immediately empty all treats you have over your dog!
- b) when your dog has calmed down, dip the nail in plain baking flour or styptic powder to stop the bleeding, if it hasn't stopped by itself already;
- c) promise your dog that you will start the desensitization process all over again. Be prepared that it will take longer this time. Consider using a nail file or Dremel instead of clippers.

