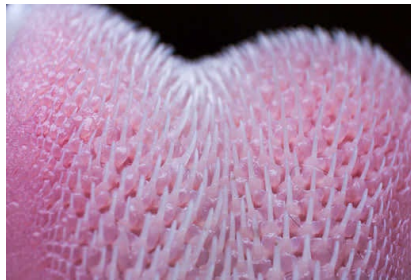


CATS IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

As a veterinarian, when dealing with passionate cat clients, their hope is for us to recognize that cats are not small dogs and they have unique qualities very different from their drooling counterparts. It is true that cats have many unique qualities, but they also have a lot of similar characteristics. One element that is challenging about veterinary medicine is learning about so many different animals and trying to be proficient with all. In order to accomplish this, we start by learning the basics for all animals and then learning the “quirks” of the individual species.

What is similar in cats and dogs as it relates to the grooming world? Cats have a similar skin cycle in that they shed twice a year typically (constantly when in doors), their skin turns over every 21 days (keratinization cycle), they are double coated (most breeds), and they are susceptible to allergies and hormonal/metabolic diseases the same as other animals.

One of the most striking differences between cats and other animals is their barbed tongue which allows them to efficiently self-groom..



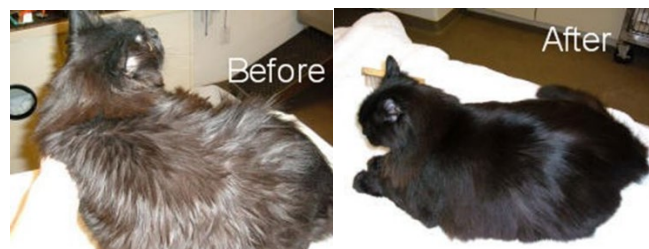
Cat tongue

A normal healthy cat can get by with a minimum groomer intervention. This doesn't mean that grooming isn't necessary. It simply means that if the cat is healthy and able to groom, then it can do parts independently (don't have to rely on the owner to brush). Due to the fact that the skin turns over every 21 days, it is always a good idea that we assist by bathing monthly to help remove the dead and dying cells from the skin. Even though they can groom and remove the dead hair by themselves, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is best for their well-being. Good self-grooming will sometimes lead to hairballs and vomiting, which can cause dehydration and secondary urinary tract infections, especially in the major shedding cycle times. If you are dealing with a long-haired cat this is usually anticipated, but it also occurs with short haired cats.

If you understand the process, then it can usually be prevented or at least dealt with to avoid major health issues. When a cat licks and swallows the hair, it accumulates in the stomach. The stomach as it contracts will cause the hair to matt just like a friction area on a dog. Once this forms, the cat either has to vomit it up or it is going to pass through the digestive tract. Both can create health issues. If vomited up easily, all is good. If we vomit multiple times and are unable to get it up, then often the cat will get dehydrated. In the same token if it passes through the intestines it can constipate the cat and they either stop eating and drinking or vomit as a response, once again, creating a dehydration situation.

Due to the dehydration, many of these cats will not produce as much urine and then get secondary urinary tract infections. This is especially a problem with the indoor obese males. They often form stones and become blocked (unable to urinate). Good grooming and home care can play a big role in the prevention of these issues. If they are already in this cycle, fluids given by the veterinarian may help avoid issues and make the groom easier.

Cats can also go through health issues that minimize or eliminate their ability to groom, thus creating a situation that leads to the need to shave a cat down. Recognizing the issue and dealing with it early is very important for the prevention of shave downs. If a cat stops grooming, then that is something that needs to be addressed and not ignored. Some of the issues that we see are metabolic or hormonal, arthritis, poor conditioning after we groom, allergies, or dry hair and skin secondary to environmental factors. If the cat is over 7 years of age, we need to consider bloodwork (although issue can occur at any age) to make sure that there isn't something health wise going on. Typically what is observed is a dry coat, often with a color change, and greasy skin. The greasy skin is the bodies way of trying to compensate for the fact the skin is irritated. Try to avoid the temptation to "degrease" these cats because by doing that you send the cat's body into shock, and they will just produce more grease as a response. What we really need to do is to confirm that there are no underlying health issues and then condition (hydrate) these coats to soothe the irritation versus making it worse. These are prime cases for condition-shampoo-condition type technique. The first condition will break down the oils and start the hydration process. The shampoo will clean off the excess oils and then by using a very hydrating conditioner, you will calm and soothe the skin. Correctly done many of these cats will return to grooming normally which minimizes future issues.



Areas that are commonly issues with many of our older cats are arthritis and obesity. They get to the point that physically they can no longer groom. This is where it becomes very important for the groomer to assist in the process. These cats are typically older and similar to older people, they don't have the ability to control their temperature well, so shaving them down is really not the best solution. It does take a commitment from the owner and the groomer to be able to maintain them. Once a month or every other month grooming is not realistic to control this issue. Daily brushing with a hydration or light spray is ideal for keeping their coats well maintained.

Cats are not small dogs, they are unique and a class of their own! They do have a lot of similarities, but they also have a whole different set of needs and problems to maintain healthy hair and skin. Once you learn how to deal with the feline mentality, grooming them can be a very rewarding aspect of your career.