



Care and Grooming: The German Shepherd Dog

Exercise Requirements

All dogs should receive daily physical and mental exercise sessions. German Shepherds need both in order to be happy, and consequently, keep their owners happy. Depending on the age and activity level of the particular dog, physical exercise might amount to throwing a ball for 10 to 30 minutes in the backyard or dog park and/or going for a walk around the block or the neighborhood.

Mental exercise is an important factor in creating a well-balanced German Shepherd Dog. Obedience sessions, learning new exercises including play breaks, make them fun for both dog and owner. Positive training can be incorporated into the dog's daily life to the enjoyment of all concerned. Interesting, indestructible, dog appropriate toys should also be provided. For example, many shepherds enjoy a hard rubber toy called a "Kong" available at many pet supply stores. Kongs come with instructions on how to fill with appropriate goodies to keep the dog interested and prevent boredom-related destructive behaviors.

Grooming

The shepherd is a "double-coated" breed. It has a "down" type undercoat next to the skin, with longer, coarse hair as an outer shell. Under normal conditions, the shepherd will only require regular brushing, and an occasional bath. Diet plays a significant part in coat condition, so feeding quality foods will help prevent any skin problems.

- [Grooming the German Shepherd](#)

Brushing

The shepherd can easily be brushed from start to finish in 10 minutes or less, provided it is brushed 3-4 times per week. Time and frequency will vary according to coat length and condition. Although long coats are considered a fault, some shepherds do sport long hair and will require more extensive brushing, more often. Use a wire "slicker" brush available at most pet stores, or coat grooming rake, and

brush with the grain of the coat. Regular brushing and handling will teach your shepherd to stand quietly and enjoy these sessions.

Bathing

Shepherds will need baths rather infrequently, provided they are fed quality food and brushed regularly. One bath per month should suffice. During flea season it is sometimes necessary to bathe more often as part of a complete program to control pests. Please do not bathe more frequently than every 10 days or so as over-bathing will strip the coat of its natural oils. It is also important to use a shampoo made for dogs, as their "pH" is different from shampoo meant for people.

- [Bathing](#)

Toenails

Your shepherd will also need to have his toenails, ears, and teeth attended to. If your dog runs on pavement daily, you probably won't have a problem with nails. However you should check the nails on a weekly basis (while you are brushing) to avoid future headaches caused by split or broken nails left growing too long. Commercial nail trimmers for dogs are available at any pet supply store. Most black and tan shepherds will have black toenails. These are usually hard in density, and will hide the "quick" (small vein that feeds the nail). It is better to trim off small amounts of nail a little at a time. If you cut the nail too short it is painful for your dog and he will bleed. If you do cut the quick of your dog, use styptic powder, scrape the nail against a bar of soap, or press cornstarch firmly into the quick to stop the bleeding. Have one of these items on hand, and within easy reach when trimming.

Ears

Ears should be checked and cleaned at least weekly. Your vet has products that will dissolve excess wax when used regularly. To clean excess wax and dirt simply deposit a few drops of the ear solution into each ear, massage the base of the ear for a few seconds, and then wipe out any debris with soft tissues or a cotton pad. The remaining solution will be shaken out by the dog or will evaporate quickly. The ear solution is inexpensive and should be purchased from your vet.

Try to avoid getting water in your shepherd's ears as it will sit at the bottom of the ear canal and can create infection. The ear solution helps keep ears dry. Prevention is the key to maintaining healthy ears.

- [Ear Cleaning](#)

Teeth

Check your shepherd's teeth once a month or more, and during your yearly vet check-up. Teeth will accumulate tartar over the years, and will need to be cleaned occasionally. Feeding hard "cookies" will help keep teeth and gums healthy.

Try to brush your shepherd's teeth at least three times a week and every day if possible. Follow these steps to get your dog used to a brushing routine.

Step 1: Acquaint your dog with the process. Begin slowly, merely touching the muzzle and lifting the lips to expose the teeth and gums. Over a few days, begin handling the mouth gently, and eventually stroke the dog's teeth and gums with a finger.

Step 2: Introduce the toothbrush and toothpaste. Always use an edible toothpaste specifically formulated for dogs; do not share your own toothpaste (which is not meant to be swallowed) with your dog. Place a small amount of toothpaste on your finger and allow the dog to sample the taste. Then, apply a small amount to the teeth and gums. When you can touch all of the teeth, place a small amount of toothpaste on the brush and gently brush one tooth and adjoining gumline.

Step 3: Begin brushing. Gradually increase the number of teeth brushed, working your way to the back molars. The dog's mouth may remain closed - the accumulation of plaque occurs mainly on the outside of the teeth. Angle the brush at a 45° angle toward the gumline and use small back-and-forth or circular strokes, gently brushing all of the teeth. Once the habit of toothbrushing has been established, brush the teeth every day if possible.