Pet Shampoos and Conditioners: What to Look For

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

humectants, moisturizers & CONDITIONERS

We receive many questions regarding which shampoos to use. We also are asked about "conditioners": what they do, if they are necessary, and how to choose one. First, we need to define "conditioners." By "conditioners" many people are referring to products applied to the skin or coat after shampooing. The truth is, there are multiple products that fit this definition, and some of the ingredients in these "conditioners" are also present in quality shampoos. Let's review what some of these agents do.

CONDITIONING AGENTS

Conditioning agents are applied to the hair or skin to smooth out the cuticle layer of the hair or penetrate the hair and strengthen its structure. They decrease tangles, and leave hair with a silky texture and luster. Look for ingredients such as hydrolyzed proteins. Conditioning agents may be present in the shampoo itself, or as separate products to apply after shampooing.

EMOLLIENTS

Emollients are usually oil-based and are used to soften the skin and protect it from dryness. They prevent the complete removal of the natural skin oils or replace them. Like conditioning agents, they also add luster to the hair. Examples of emollients include oils such as safflower oil, borage oil, and wheat germ oil. Emollients, too, may be present in shampoos as well as conditioners and creme rinses.

HUMECTANTS AND MOISTURIZERS

Humectants are oil-free agents that draw moisture into the upper layers of the skin. They can decrease dry flaky skin, restore moisture after shampooing, and reduce static electricity. Examples of humectants include glycerin, urea, sodium lactate, lactic acid, carboxylic acid, propylene glycol, and sorbitol. Humectants can be

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used after bathing or between baths, and can be applied to either damp or dry skin. It's important that the humectant reach the skin, and is not simply applied to the top layer of the hair coat. All of the Drs. Foster and Smith shampoos, conditioners, and creme rinses contain humectants.

For the best approach to caring for your dog's skin and coat, we recommend choosing shampoos that contain conditioning agents, emollients, humectants, and moisturizers. A conditioner or creme rinse can further amplify the benefits of these ingredients. Finally, we advise using a leave-on humectant that will help retain moisture. Using this combination, you'll have a pet with skin that's the healthiest, and a coat that's glossy and tangle-free.

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