

# How to Bathe a Cat



Everyone knows that cats hate getting wet. Cats generally keep themselves clean, and therefore should not be bathed any more often than is absolutely necessary. But they sometimes get especially dirty, get bombarded by fleas or ticks, or get into substances that are toxic or otherwise harmful. On such occasions, it is a good idea to bathe your cat. Here's how to keep your feline fresh and lovely as painlessly as possible.

---

## Steps

---

1. **Decide whether your cat really needs a bath.** There may be other ways to clean your cat, such as [brushing the cat](#), combing or even rubbing down with a cloth.



2.



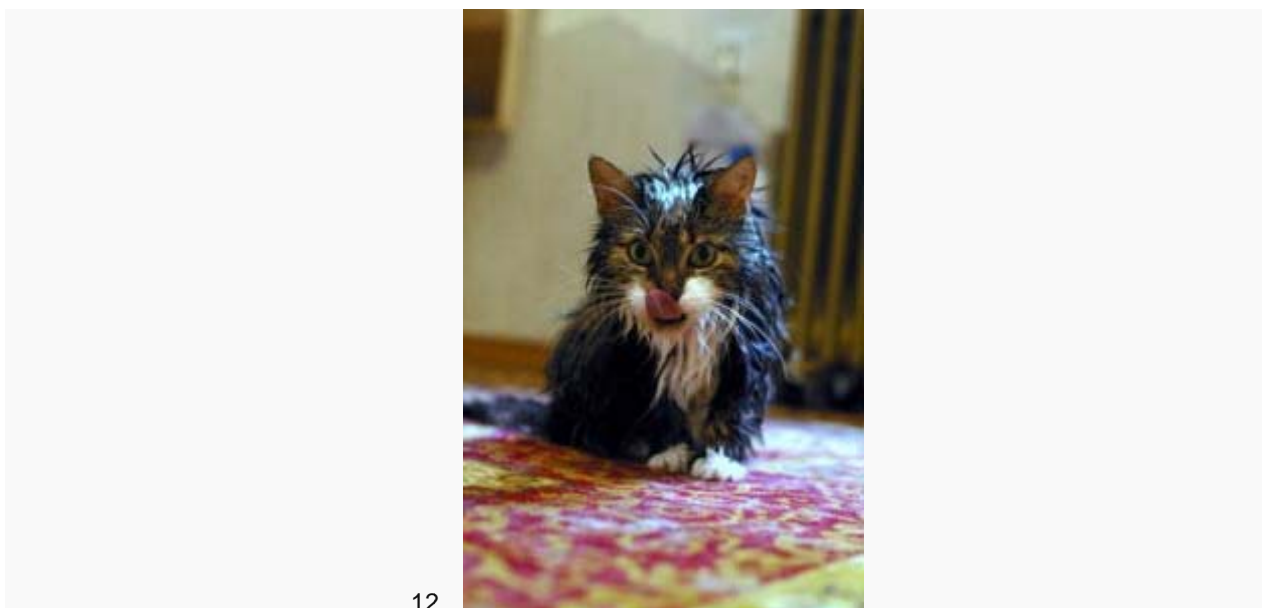
**Wear appropriate clothing.** Not only is it important to wash your cat but it is important to be safe from any possible scratches, major or minor. A jumper or a long-sleeved shirt must be worn so that your cat has no bare skin to scratch, and it is a good idea to wear clothing that isn't new.

3. **Get at least two people involved** in washing your cat, especially if your cat is rather strong and can kick and wriggle its way out of your hands. One person should hold all four legs and hold the cat's jaw so it can't open its mouth to bite you. Hold your cat firmly so it cannot wriggle out from your grip.
4. **Trim all nails** before even attempting to wash a cat - this will reduce scratching.
5. **Put a rubber mat in the tub or use a towel.** Fill the tub no more than 4-5 inches deep with warm water (depends on size of the animal).

6. **Fill the tub and a separate bucket (2 to 5 gallons) before bringing your cat into the bathroom.** This avoids the sound of running water, which generally stresses felines.
7. **Have shampoo and a small wash cloth ready.** Have two towels at hand for drying your cat.
8. **Comb the fur thoroughly** before you put the cat in the water, especially if the cat is long-haired. Remove knots and tangles before wetting the fur, or the task will be next to impossible.
9. **Use a calm, quiet voice while washing your cat** and keep a good grip on the neck or shoulders. Sometimes cats, obviously, will try to get out of the tub. If they prefer to have only two of their feet in the water, face them toward the back of the tub and let them stand on two feet.
10. **Choose an appropriate shampoo.** Check with your vet to select the shampoo best suited to your cat's condition. Human shampoos are not pH adjusted to cat skin and medicated shampoos may be too harsh or toxic. If your cat has fleas, use flea shampoo formulated for cats.



**Soak the cat from the neck down**, using a wash cloth. Use a little bit of shampoo and with the water, wash your cat's neck, body, legs, belly and tail. Be sure to not get shampoo in their eyes, nose, mouth, or ears.



**Rinse thoroughly with the water in the tub**, then drain the tub and rinse two more times with the water in the bucket; it is essential to remove all the soap from the coat.



Let the water drip from the cat while gently pressing as much water as you can from the fur before you wrap your cat in the towel. Rub gently with one towel. When the first towel gets too wet to be effective, switch to the dry towel. Don't stop until the cat is just damp. Try warming the towels in the dryer first -- many cats find this comforting.

#### 14. Finish the drying:



Short-haired cats can finish drying themselves in the bathroom as long as they're away from drafts.

- o With long-haired cats, you will have to use a comb and more towels. Long hairs mat more easily when wet, so you may wish to comb the coat until it is completely dry.

---

## Alternate Shower Techniques

---

1. **Recognize that it may be helpful to wash your cat in a shower stall** (if you have one with a door, not curtain). The cat is essentially trapped in the shower without you having to hold on. Make sure the cat has good traction (a small towel in the bathtub will help if you have no rubber mat) or you will have a panic-stricken cat that is likely to seek safety in height by trying to climb you like a tree.
2. **Buy a hose adapter for your bathroom sink** (try a water-bed store) and a hose long enough to reach over the shower door and back down to the shower floor. Or, get a hand held spray shower and a Y-adapter to connect it to your regular shower head.
3. **Hose your cat down, lather up, hose down to rinse, then proceed with drying.** Some cats seem to actually enjoy the massage settings on hand held showers, especially on the back of the neck and down the ridge of the back.

4. **Some cats can be unnerved by running water.** Try to run a bath when they are distracted and make sure to set aside rinse water in separate refilled containers. This tends to cut down on the scratching, also.
5. **Use separate bathing stations** even with cats that have never been bathed before. Have a couple buckets filled with warm water. Dip the cat in and using a wash cloth make sure the cat is entirely wet, then soap the cat down. Next, put the cat in another bucket to rinse until soap is gone. Make sure to use warm enough water and to dry thoroughly. Cats are prone to pneumonia, bronchitis and other breathing problems associated with temperature changes.

---

## Alternate Dry Shampoo Option

---

1. **Dust the cat with cornstarch.** Gently pet the cat to thoroughly rub the cornstarch into its fur. Let the cat clean itself with its normal grooming routine. This technique is far less traumatic than using water, and works especially well if the cat is greasy, however, use it for non-toxic dirt only. Do not use this technique if the cat has gotten into something poisonous.

---

## Tips

---

- Cats' natural body temperatures are several degrees above a human's, so what feels luke-warm to you can feel uncomfortably cold to a cat. It can be less uncomfortable for a cat if you bathe it in fairly hot water and steam up the bathroom so warm air is circulating. (Imagine if someone suddenly tossed you into a tepid swimming pool. Or how it feels when you finish with your shower and open the door, letting the regular air in. Feels freezing against your wet skin, right?)



Your cat has its own personality. While these are all good suggestions, be aware of your cat's reactions, and be prepared to adjust tactics accordingly.

- Try giving your cat a treat after the bath; it might improve the tension for future baths!
- The younger you start bathing your cat, the easier it will be as the cat will become familiar with it as part of its routine.
- Brave souls may find it easier to put on old clothing and sit in the tub holding the cat (however the cat typically likes to be held) and letting someone else actually bathe the cat.

- When you have more time, run a very shallow warm bath (only a cm deep or so to begin with). Pet the cat, and give it a treat if it is food oriented. Continue at this depth until the cat does not panic and try to escape. Repeat daily, until the cat treats it as part of a routine, gradually increasing the depth until it is accepting standing in 4-5 ins of water. As a final step, have someone else reassure the cat whilst you use your hand to gently make waves in the water. This can take a week, or months depending on the cat, but it is worth the perseverance to know that you can safely bathe your pet when necessary.
- If all else fails, take your cat to a reputable, professional pet groomer (i.e. PetSmart, PetCo) or a vet for their washing. They will be able to use techniques to keep the cat calm. If you have the petclub membership you could get a coupon for coming often.
- Some cats will do better in an empty tub (or sink) with water being poured on rather than being put into a tub with water already in it.
- If you are giving your cat a flea bath, wet the area around its neck first. Fleas will try to escape to the dry areas of the cat, which can mean a mass exodus of fleas to the head and face while you are bathing. A wet neck will keep them off the head, and in contact with the water and flea shampoo.
- You may find it helpful, if you have a cat that is very attached to you and is not scratching but is just scared, to simply [take a shower](#) with your animal. Wear a heavy sweatshirt and allow the cat to sit on your chest. The cat will most likely bury its face in your neck and feel calmed. Wash and rinse your cat as normal.
- Another idea is to place your cat and water in a small plastic dishwashing tub (about 12x18 in.) and stand over it. This way, you can more easily control the cat, and it is harder for it to escape. I've found that never letting my cat escape on its own, and only letting it go when I am done has helped it be calm and cooperative during baths. It also helps to make bath time **quick and gentle**.
- An oven rack can be used to give the cat something to hold onto. This reduces the chance of you being scratched and makes the cat feel better.
- If you have a litter box in the same room as you are bathing the cat, remove it! Sometimes after the cat is put in the bath and it happens to escape it may go to the litter box and soon your floor will be covered in litter!
- The YouTube video "How to Wash a Cat", though originally intended for comedy, has a lot of good tips in it. (Note: It says to drop the cat when putting it in the tub. Don't do this as your cat will only become angry.)

---

## Warnings

---

- Make sure the outside air temperature is over 70 degrees and at low humidity. Bathed cats can, and will, contract pneumonia, as they are easily chilled. Keep bathed cat indoors in warm family room for 12 hours if weather won't cooperate.
- Watch out for cat claws if you decide to bathe your cat. Wearing a thick, long-sleeved sweater is one way to avoid getting scratched badly while bathing your cat. [Be patient](#) and gentle; it is natural for cats to fight the water because it simply doesn't feel right.

- If you don't know how to properly hold a cat by the scruff, don't do it. Your cat may choke.
- Don't put shampoo on their head. It could get in their eyes.
- Be aware that you shouldn't bathe your cat frequently, this technique is just in case your pet is really dirty.
- Although some cats may accept the bath without great complaints, they may get nervous or angry or too scared when you try to dry them. Be careful during this last phase-- shut the door of the bathroom or the cat will run away all wet, keep it calm or it will urinate, creating a big mess.
- If you find your cat objects too much to a bath by hissing at you and trying to escape, then forget the bath. Use a wet washcloth instead. It removes the outer dirt, and cleans well. At your local pet store, you can find treated cloths that need no water to be used to groom the cat. They even have a pleasant scent.
- Cats absorb chemicals through their skin, so they must be very well rinsed. Rinse until you see only clear water running off the cat.
- Make sure to use specially formulated shampoo for cats. Your hair is different from that of your cat, and your shampoo will only irritate your cat's skin.
- Do not use flea shampoos for dogs on your cat. They may contain ingredients that are harmful to your cat. Be sure to read the label on all products, and be aware that some flea products formulated for cats may still cause a reaction.
- Do not bathe your pet any more than once every two weeks. Excessive bathing may remove protective oils from its fur, making it appear dull, and reducing the fur's natural efficiency against the elements.
- Never use sinks that are freestanding because your cat might jump and slip from being wet and hurt itself.
- Never get soap in your cat's eyes. As a safeguard, put 1 to 2 drops of eye lubricant into each eye just before bathing. You can use any human labelled eye drops that are indicated as a non-medicated ocular lubricant, often used for dry eye syndrome. They are available as over the counter (OTC) products at most drug stores. Examples include Tears Natural II drops or as a gel (Genteal).
- Similarly, do not get soapy water into your cat's ears. To minimize the risk of creating an ear infection (otitis externa), put a pledget of cotton in each ear. Don't forget to take them out at the end of the bath. The cotton may also reduce the noise and make your job easier. At the very least your cat may be pre-occupied with the cotton in its ears and remain distracted. If your cat's ears are particularly filthy, gently wipe the insides with a warm, damp wash cloth with no soap. Cat's ears contain protective waxes and oils that should not be removed.
- Listen for sounds of unhappiness. These sounds include hissing, growling, breathing hard, sneezing, crying, and meowing.
- Avoid using a blow dryer on a short-haired cat or kitten as it may burn them and/or cause more trauma. Short-haired cats can bathe themselves dry.

- **Never force your cat's head under the water!** To wash their head and face, use a wash cloth.
- Cold water will shock your cat. Just as said before, "Not luke-warm, almost hot!"

---

## Things You'll Need

---

- Shampoo
- Conditioner
- 2 towels
- Brush/comb
- Your cat
- A bath
- Warm water (Not luke warm. Almost hot!)
- A jumper or a long sleeved shirt
- 2 or more people