

# The art of body massage (for your pet!)

Happy and well-trained pets feel secure and relaxed when they are being touched. They actually find it a pleasurable experience. One way we can teach our pets to not just tolerate handling but to actually enjoy



the process is through the simple exercise of body massage.

This will not only be beneficial to you but it will also make life easier for your vet, groomer and anyone else that comes in contact with your dog.

When I was first introduced to this exercise in formal training classes it was forced behavioral training. Trainers actually made dogs submit to handling through dominance training. I quickly realized that I could achieve more positive, enjoyable results by helping dogs understand that when people touched them it was a wonderful feeling. Every touch experience becomes be enjoyable.

Body massage works well for all types of pets – not just dogs!

## How to massage your pet

1. Sit behind your dog and begin by gently stroking around their shoulders. I personally like to sit in this position as it makes it easier to reach the area but if your dog is uncomfortable just begin by sitting at their side.
2. As your dog relaxes start making circular motions with your hands and applying a small amount of pressure. Never massage hard enough to make your dog uncomfortable.

3. Work your way down slowly toward the back and shoulders massaging as you go.
4. When Sparky relaxes try massaging his head with the same gentle circular motions.
5. Stroke their muzzle gently from the base of their nose, between the eyes and up the head.
6. You may find Sparky gets so relaxed he rolls upside over in a very relaxed posture. This is a great moment that should be rewarded with soft, kind praise and a generous belly rub.
7. As your dog gets comfortable start massaging all parts of the body from head to tail.
8. Massage your dog's muzzle gently working into his mouth and massaging the gums. If Sparky starts to mouth or bite down too hard yelp, remove your hands and stop the massage for 5 seconds. Resume the exercise until your dog does not apply pressure to your hands.
9. To massage your pets ears start by rubbing the ear in a circular motion between your thumb and fingers. Then slowly desensitize them to having you touch the inside of the ear.
10. While massaging their tail actually pull gently to simulate a child grabbing the tail so that they will not be startled or afraid if this occurs.
11. The paws are for most dogs the most sensitive area when it comes to handling. This can be problematic as you must be able to trim the hair and nails and tend to any injuries that might occur.
12. Start at the shoulder area and work your way down their legs to the paw.
13. At first do no more than touch the top of the paw. Do not try to hold them as this should never be a power struggle.
14. When your dog accepts your touch begin stroking more of the paw until you are able to massage not only the top of their feet but also between the pads.

## Tips

1. This exercise can be done any time you are just relaxing with your pup. Whether we are watching a movie or just sitting together enjoying a sunset I do body massage on my pets. I find it to be a very calming exercise for me and they enjoy the hands on experience so it is a win win situation for both of us.
2. When your dog gets accustomed to the massage begin applying a bit more pressure to their ears and tail. This is a safeguard as children have a tendency to approach our pets in an inappropriate manner. They may inadvertently pull on your pups ears or tail and this can help your dog practice self control under these circumstances.