



animal gets wet, the mat tightens and becomes even more painful. The skin underneath the mat becomes irritated and can get infected.

### Where do mats form?

Mats can form pretty much anywhere on an animal's body. They're most often found behind the ears, around the collar, under the front legs, between the hind legs and along the back of the haunches.

### How are mats removed?

When a mat cannot be gently teased apart, many people are tempted to cut it out. The problem is that mats are usually quite close to the skin, and when an animal starts to wriggle, it's easy to make a mistake and cut your pet! Large, painful mats should be removed by a veterinarian or groomer.

BOJAN FATUR/ISTOCK

## Brushing up on the basics

Many of us wake up in the morning and have to comb the tangles out of our hair. Ouch! Tugging on them can hurt. But we know that if we don't brush our hair every day, the knots will get so bad we might just have to shave our heads!

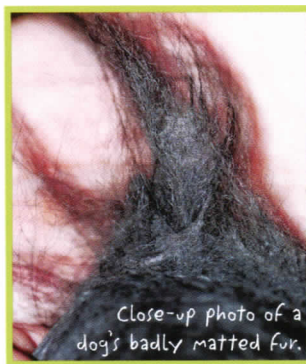
The same goes for our pets – particularly long-haired cats, dogs and rabbits – only they can't run a brush through their coats. When an animal's hair is not groomed regularly, it can get so badly tangled that it forms mats. And mats are definitely something you want to avoid!

### What's a mat?

A mat begins when small tangles of hair get snarled together. Over time, more and more hair is pulled into the snarl. Dead, shedding hair can get caught in the mat too.

### What's so bad about mats?

As the mat grows, it starts to pull on the animal's skin and is very uncomfortable. The bigger the mat gets, the more the skin is pulled – to the point where the skin is being pulled constantly. Imagine how painful that would be! Each time the



Close-up photo of a dog's badly matted fur.



RYERSON CLARK/ISTOCK

Something as simple as brushing your pet every day can save her from a lot of discomfort and pain later on. Even short-haired animals benefit from regular brushing a few times a week.

Brushing also helps to remove loose hair. And for cats and rabbits who groom themselves, that's really important! The less hair your cat ingests while licking herself, the fewer hairballs she might throw up. As for rabbits, they can't bring up hairballs. So hair can collect in their stomach to the point where they get seriously ill.

## Tools of the trade

### Slicker brush

Good for thick coats and for working out tangles. Don't use too roughly, as the wire bristles can scratch sensitive skin.



### Pin and bristle brush

Good for many coat types, especially short coats. Helps stimulate the skin to produce natural oils, which make the coat shiny and healthy-looking.



### Comb

Good for gently removing any tangles remaining after brushing. Can also be used to clean out a brush full of hair.

