

# S-C-E-N-T: 5 Checks to Good Health and Handling

Every time your dog is seen by a pet professional, whether it be a veterinarian, groomer, or even your trainer, they will want to check five areas through a visual and physical inspection.

Here is a fun mnemonic device to help you remember all the things you should regularly check on your pet. Doing this often will not only allow you to spot what might be a potential health concern, but if done in a positive and gentle way, your dog will learn to enjoy being touched!

These five areas are best remembered by a mnemonic device: **SCENT**. This stands for Skin, Coat, Ears, Nails, and Teeth.

**NOTE:** We recommend that you mark behaviors with a soft verbal marker, such as "Yes" or "Yup." The sound of the clicker can often be too stimulating for a dog. **IF**, at any point, your dog becomes tense, growls, or continues to find being touched unpleasant, **DO NOT** resume with the steps outlined in this handout. It is best to seek the assistance of your trainer.


## S: Skin

**(for rashes, ticks, redness, irritation, flaky dry skin, etc.)**

- By checking for ticks and fleas often, you can prevent an infestation from happening.
- Flaky dry skin can be an early sign of over washing or a nutrient deficiency in your dog's diet.
- If you notice redness, rashes, speak with your veterinarian. Catching this early can save you money and time in the long run.

### **STEPS TO FOLLOW:**

1. Lay your palm flat on your dog's back, and slowly move your hand against the grain of the fur. Move slowly from your dog's rump towards the neck. Mark and treat your dog for accepting this petting.
2. Do the same on your dog's sides, moving from the rear to the shoulder. Mark and treat.
3. Cue a down, and do the same for your dog's stomach and chest. This works even better if your dog is comfortable rolling on his back. Mark and treat.

 If your dog shows signs of fear or discomfort, start by briefly and lightly touching him, marking, and then treating. Work up to longer strokes over time.


## C: Coat

**(for dandruff, bald patches, tangles, etc.)**

- In long-coated breeds, tangles or mats can quickly become painful. These knots get tighter and tighter with each passing day. When the mats become bigger, they pull on your dog's skin. Mats can also trap moisture and burs close to the skin, which leads to irritation.
- Dry skin and coat can be a sign of nutritional deficiency or over washing.
- Take note of the texture of your dog's coat. Is it shiny, dry, brittle, dull?

### **STEPS TO FOLLOW:**

1. When your dog is tired and resting, rub him down all over. Reward with treats for calm behaviors and accepting being petted and massaged.
2. Start with long, slow strokes from the base of the skull down to the back and tail. Use medium to hard pressure. Mark and treat.
3. Rub down front legs, starting at the shoulder moving down to the toes. Mark and treat.
4. Repeat on back legs starting at hips, moving down to the toes. This can be done while your dog is lying down or standing. Remember to mark and treat, especially if your dog doesn't find it rewarding to be touched in certain spots.
5. Check behind the ears and armpit area for matting. Mark and treat.

 If your dog shows signs of fear or discomfort, start by briefly and lightly touching him, marking, and then treating. Work up to longer strokes over time. Applying circular motions helps to relieve tension in the muscles.


## E: Ears

**(for infections, irritation, discharge, swelling, mites, etc.)**

- Ear infections can be very painful for dogs. In extreme circumstances, when left untreated they can cause hearing loss and disfiguring of the ear. Catching an ear infection early can reduce the amount of time needed to treat.

### **STEPS TO FOLLOW:**

1. Reach towards your dog's ears. Mark and treat. Continue to repeat this step until your dog is happily anticipating you reaching towards his head.
2. Reach and gently touch your dog's ear for a brief moment. Mark and treat.
3. Reach and gently lift your dog's ear for a brief moment. Mark and treat
4. Reach and gently lift your dog's ear and massage for a few seconds. Mark and treat.

 If your dog doesn't seem to be comfortable with you lifting his ears, make sure you spend extra time massaging the base of the ears on a routine basis. Use slow, circular motions around the base of the ears, back of the head, and forehead.

## N: Nails


**(for appropriate length, splits, infections, discoloration, etc.)**

- You will want to check that your dog's nails are at an appropriate length. If you can hear your dog's nails hitting the floor when he walks on tile or hard wood, they are too long.
- Check that they are not split or curving sideways due to pressure on the nail bed.
- Check the underside of their paws to ensure there aren't any burs or mud stuck in the hair that grows in between the pads.
- This process is important to go through routinely as your dog's nails will need to be trimmed every six weeks. If you spend the time handling their feet at a young age, they will be more comfortable with the process of having their nails trimmed or dremeled.

### **STEPS TO FOLLOW:**

1. When your dog is calm, begin by petting him from the shoulder down to his foot. Mark and treat if he shows any signs of discomfort.

2. Lift up one foot. Mark and treat.
3. Practice lifting up each of the remaining feet one at a time. Mark and treat.
4. Lift up each foot and hold briefly. Mark and treat.
5. Lift up each foot and quickly look at nails, massaging the paw in order to expose them. Mark and treat.
6. Work up to your dog being comfortable with you touching between the toes and applying a little bit of pressure on the nail by holding it between your fingers.

 If your dog finds any of this unpleasant, remember to take it slowly. Before you move on to any step in the process, you want your dog to be excited about the step you're currently working on. Look for jubilation, not tolerance, before moving forward.


## T: Teeth

**(for discoloration, brushing, tartar, plaque, chipping, broken teeth, etc.)**

- There are many times you will want to look inside your dog's mouth. If your dog gets a hold of something inappropriate, you will want to be able to safely handle your dog. Of course, we would recommend training a very good "drop it" cue as well.
- Your dog will need to have his teeth brushed, especially if he doesn't like to chew on items that would keep his teeth clean.
- Dogs can be very stoic, even when in pain. You may not know that they have a broken tooth until it develops an abscess and the face begins to swell. By inspecting your dog's teeth regularly, you can catch signs of wear, cracks, or even breaks before they become emergencies.

### **STEPS TO FOLLOW:**

1. Gently rest your left hand under your dog's chin. Mark and then treat your dog for calmly waiting.
2. With your right hand, use your thumb to gently lift the lip up. Mark and treat.
3. Lift the lip up again, only this time inspect the teeth briefly. Mark and then treat your dog for calm behaviors.
4. Repeat on the other side of your dog's mouth.
5. When your dog is comfortable with you briefly checking his teeth, work up to longer durations.
6. When your dog is resting and you are comfortably petting him, take time to massage the gums by gently applying circular motions over the flaps of his mouth. This is especially important to do with young puppies to help them get used to having their mouths touched without nipping. It will also help ease any pain in the gums from teething.

 Dogs hold a lot of tension and emotion in their faces, particularly their muzzle and mouths. Bored or hyperactive dogs sometimes have a tendency to bark or chew to relieve anxiety. Massaging the muzzle and gum lines can help to alleviate that tension.