

Good Chinchilla Grooming Tips

How to get your chinchilla to look and feel its best.

By Jennifer Mons McLaughlin

Grooming isn't just for good looks. "Grooming does help cut down on the amount of fur they're shedding and ingesting," said Misty O'Neil, owner of Eyes of Texas Chinchillas in Round Rock, Texas.

Still, some people choose not to groom. That is all right, too, because chins tend to do most of it themselves. "All chinchillas do groom themselves to some extent, similar to a cat," said Amanda Eads, archive chairman of the Chinchillas As Pets Association.

Chins do need regular baths — but never in water. Dust baths work best for chins and can be given by putting the dust (sold at pet stores) in a bowl or enclosed container and pouring it on the chin. "Automatically, by nature, they will start rolling in it," O'Neil said, "and that dust penetrates down to the bottom of the fur and penetrates the oil."

Putting a chin in water is a definite no-no. The fur is so dense that getting it wet will cause clumping and might lead to problems. This dense fur also repels fleas, as fleas cannot get into the fur to burrow. The fur also gives chins their unique feel.

"Chins are so soft because of the fact that they have 80 hairs per follicle, as compared with one hair per follicle in humans," said Deborah Kemmerer Cottrell, DVM, of West End Animal Hospital in Newberry, Fla.

Lani Ritchey, author of *The Joy Of Chinchillas* and chin owner for more than 25 years, suggested grooming chins several times a year with a good cat or dog comb that has medium-length teeth. She also recommended checking the male for hair rings on a regular basis.

"Hair rings, or hair mats, are hair wrapped around the penis," she said. Any male could suffer from this. Some might develop a hair ring once a month and others might never develop one.