

## Dr. Ruth MacPete, DVM

Ruth has more than 15 years of experience in the veterinary industry as a companion animal veterinarian in private practice. Along with being a writer and media personality, she is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

Like certain people, some dog [breeds](#) could be considered a little high maintenance. Breeds such as [Shih Tzu](#), [Lhasa Apso](#), [Poodle](#), and [Maltese](#) — among others — require regular grooming. For these breeds, grooming is not a matter of vanity, but a necessity. Unless regularly brushed and properly groomed, many long-haired dogs can become horribly matted. Without treatment, these mats can be painful because they pull on the underlying skin, and can lead to [sores](#) and skin infections. In addition, mats attract debris and dirt and become a safe haven for [parasites](#). Many matted [dogs](#) become infested with [fleas](#).

### Scruffy's extreme hair story

Working as a [shelter veterinarian](#), I see way too many severely matted dogs. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, Scruffy, as I will lovingly call him, came into the shelter where I work. Scruffy was so badly matted you couldn't see his eyes. He was matted from head to toe, and the mats extended down to the skin. He was so painful to the touch and [terrified](#) that I had to sedate him in order to examine and groom him. One hour later, surrounded by a "hair rug" the size of a bathmat, Scruffy was a new dog. Not only did he look much better, but he also seemed to have a new attitude as he unleashed his inner friendly puppy. Luckily, he only had a minor skin infection from the severe matting, and after a medicated bath and a week's worth of antibiotics, his skin was back to normal.

Scruffy was lucky someone found him and brought him into the shelter, where he could receive the care he needed and deserved. Unfortunately, he is not a unique case. I see severely matted dogs several times a week. Many have severe skin infections with open infected sores that are often infested with [maggots](#). Yes maggots! The moist [oozing sores](#) attract flies that lay their eggs in the wounds. Can you imagine having maggots crawling all over your skin and not being able to do anything about it?

The fact is, if you have a dog with long hair, he needs regular maintenance and care. Failure to properly care for your dog's coat can lead to severe matting and skin infections. If you don't have the means or desire to regularly groom your dog, avoid getting a dog with hair that will require regular grooming. If you notice a severely matted and neglected pet in your neighborhood, please call your local animal shelter so that they can take action.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*