

Hair Clipper Maintenance

TOP 10 THINGS TO IMPROVE HAIR CLIPPER PERFORMANCE

Use and maintenance of clippers and clipper blades are a source of frustration and increased costs for many veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and groomers. Techniques to optimize performance of clipping hair and in the proper maintenance of clippers and clipper blades are often omitted in the spirit of time or urgent care needs. However suboptimal clipper maintenance can be an expensive problem because of the cost of clipper units, costs of new clipper blades, and costs associated with having clipper blades sharpened. No matter if the unit is cordless or corded, the number one cause of frustration and diminished life expectancy for clippers is **DULL BLADES** and **POORLY MAINTAINED** clippers. These tips will help extend the life of the clipper unit and of the sharpness of clipper blades.

- 1. Clean often (even with the same patient).** The short hair of livestock readily becomes entrapped behind the sliding blade and causes double cutting which rapidly leads to dulling of the blade (like sliding a knife through the ground). Also, dirt and other debris from the hair coat becomes entrapped in the blades and can cause rapid dulling of their edges. Take the blade off, remove all impacted hair—with a fine toothed brush such as a tooth brush. Examine the blade and clean or replace it before placing it back onto the clipper. During clipping, consider using a blade wash solution. To prevent the wash from entering the clipper housing, the clipper blade should not be “on” during washing. Reapply lubricant after washing.
- 2. Take your time.** Clipping the hair is not a race with a prize awarded for being first. The clippers should be advanced at a steady pace consistent with the cutting efficiency of the blade. Going too fast forces the sliding blade through the hair before it can cut it, which results in tearing the hair along the edge. This causes dulling of the blade because of interference with half-cut hairs, etc. Going too slow causes the blade to cut the same hair two or more times, and thus, shortens the lifetime of the sharp edge.
- 3. Cut against the hair.** Too often people start the cut downwards or “with the direction of the hair”, especially when the hair is long, causing the clipper blade to cut through the dirtier portion of the hair. This technique requires multiple layers of clipping to get down to the skin (you will have to go back and cut the starting point again). This also tangles hair into the blade and increases the rate of hair entrapment in the blade which leads to double cutting, etc. Part the hair, place the blade against the skin, and start advancing the blade along the skin surface in opposite direction of the laying hair.
- 4. Use lubricant diligently.** One of the first things people do when the blades become dull is apply lubricants (spray, oil, etc). Surface blades should always be cleaned prior to applying lubricants. Applying lubricant to hair impacted blades causes the hair to clump and become entrapped between the sliding blade and the stationary blade. Excessive use of oil can make it difficult to cut the hair.
- 5. Prepare your patient.** Hair clippers are meant to cut hair; not manure, not dirt, not suture, not tape, and certainly not skin or other objects. Cutting anything other than hair shortens the lifetime of the sharp edge. Take a few moments to clean the hair in the area needing to be clipped. A quick brushing or washing can extend the lifetime of the sharp edge. Consider vacuuming the patient before and during clipping to remove dirt, debris and loose hair. This will decrease contamination of the blade and lengthen the lifetime of the sharp edge.



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- 6. Use the right blade for the job.** Number 40 blades are great for surgical fields, but not intended to shear sheep. If you are clipping a heavy, dense hair coat, start with a larger blade made for cutting dense hair. In most animals, a number 10 clipper blade is sufficient to remove the dense hair and then can be followed by the number 40 blade. In cases such as shaving sheep or deer, it is more advantageous to use a wool or livestock shearer before starting with the standard hair clipper.
- 7. Assess blades with each use.** If the blades are underperforming on your current patient, chances are they will perform poorly on the next case. Take them off, clean the clipper, and replace the blade. Adjust tension each time a blade is changed or replaced. Proper tension is necessary to ensure the proper cutting power is used so that the sliding blade does not interfere with the stationary blade and that excess hair and dirt do not become impacted in the clippers. Proper tension ensures that proper cutting power is used which means the sliding blade does not interfere with the stationary blade, reducing incidence of excess hair and dirt impacting the clippers. Have the blade professionally sharpened at the earliest opportunity. To increase the lifetime of your blades, choose an experienced clipper blade sharpener. If the clipper blades have any missing teeth, they need to be discarded. If the blade shows any signs of rust, they need to be repaired.
- 8. Store your blades.** Do not leave your clipper blades on the clippers. After you have finished for the day, remove the blades, clean them and the clippers, lubricate the blades, and then place the clipper blades into a storage case or small zip lock bag. If you wash your blades, make sure they are completely dry before lubricating them then place them in storage to prevent rust.
- 9. Maintain clippers like a finely tuned engine.** Clippers are manufactured for specific tasks under specific conditions. Don't just throw them back in the clipper box. Take them apart, clean them per manufacturer's recommendations, lubricate them, reassemble, and store. Keep clippers out of water and weather. Rust is your enemy. If the clipper blade assembly is vibrating abnormally, the clipper needs adjustment or repair. The abnormal vibrating may indicate that the clipper is getting too hot too fast when in use or the blades are not oscillating normally. Underpowered or faulty clipper motors will accelerate dulling of blades. Check the tension/tuning of the clipper unit. Incorrect tension or tuning will cause blades to perform poorly. Store clippers in a clean, dry place.
- 10. You get what you pay for.** Purchasing inexpensive clippers usually results in frustration because of poor performance and more frequent replacement of clippers. Buy a sufficient number of clippers for the tasks best suited for your needs from well-known manufacturers with trusted reputations. Review consumer feedback for clipper manufacturers, and do not expect clippers to perform similarly across species.

