



Why your Doodle hates brush time and exactly what to do about it.

*Why they pull away when you brush
— and the 14-day plan to win back their trust.*

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Founders of [The Doodle Brush](https://thedoodlebrush.com) and professional Doodle breeders of 20 years.

Having bred Labradoodles and Bernedoodles professionally for almost 20 years, we're on a mission to make grooming easy and enjoyable for Doodles and their families around the world. If your Doodle runs for cover when the brush comes out, or tries to escape every stroke of the brush, you're in the right place. We've helped thousands of Doodles to overcome their fear and get comfortable being brushed, so let's get started helping your Doodle too. We promise it will be easier than you think!

Why they pull away from the brush

Dogs don't remember brushing. They remember how it felt. One bad snag behind the ear teaches them more than ten good sessions do, and they remember it next time. They're not being naughty. It is learned behaviour. They're remembering it was painful and want to avoid it.

So if brushing keeps going badly, something is making it feel bad. Nearly always, it's one — or more — of three things.

1. Sharp pins scratch the skin

Look closely at the ends of the pins. Most standard slickers have sharp, unpolished tips that catch on the skin with every stroke — and sensitive areas like the ears, armpits and tummy feel it most. Round, smooth tips don't. This one has nothing to do with how you brush. It's the brush itself.

2. Rigid brush heads tug and pull

If the head of the brush is stiff and doesn't move, it stops dead when it hits a tangle instead of easing through it. Your dog feels that tug before you even notice it. A flexible head that bends gives a little instead, so it absorbs resistance and the tangle comes apart without the yank.

3. Short pins miss the undercoat

Most slicker pins are under 10mm long — long enough to look like they're working, not long enough to reach the undercoat where tangles actually form. So the coat feels brushed. Underneath, a tangle is quietly tightening — and every time you brush over it, it hurts.

It doesn't take long for a smart Doodle to work out that brush means pain. And the instinct to push through it — holding them still, rushing to get it over with, brushing harder to force a tangle out — only deepens that association. It's the surest way to make next week's session harder than this one.

WHICH ONE IS IT?

Run the brush lightly over the back of your own hand. If the tips feel sharp there, they feel sharp on your dog. Then try it on a tangle: if it stops dead instead of easing through, that's a rigid head. Most dogs who pull away are putting up with at least two of these three at once.

MYTH: "BRUSH HARDER AND IT'LL COME OUT"

Pushing harder doesn't get you deeper. It just teaches them to dread the next time. If a stroke would scratch your own arm, it's too hard — the pins need to change, not the pressure.

The coat you can't see



Quick question.

When you look at your Doodle, how many coats do you see? One, right? The soft, gorgeous one you stroke every day.

But there are actually two.

Under the coat you see, most Doodles carry a dense, soft undercoat. It sits right against the skin, and it's a trap. Loose hair doesn't fall away from a Doodle. It gets caught in there.

Trapped hair twists around itself. That's a tangle. Leave a tangle alone and it tightens. That's a mat.

All of it happens in the one place you can't see — and it's exactly where a short-pinned brush can't reach. So the top coat gets brushed, looks tidy, feels fine. Underneath, a tangle is still there, pulling at the skin every time it gets caught. Your dog isn't reacting to nothing. They're reacting to something you can't see either.

READ THIS TWICE

Mats don't start on the surface, ever. They start in the undercoat, against the skin. That's why a Doodle can look and feel perfectly brushed while a mat is quietly tightening underneath — and why brushing can keep hurting even when nothing looks wrong.

MYTH: "IT'S JUST THEIR COAT TYPE. SOME DOODLES ARE MORE DIFFICULT"

It's tempting to think a curly or dense coat is the reason brushing is such a battle. It isn't. What decides whether brushing hurts isn't the coat. It's whether the brush reaches the undercoat without scratching or tugging on the way there. That's a tool problem, not a coat or behaviour problem.

How to fix it

Once the pain stops, the fear usually follows — but it takes some time and a little help. Switching the tools is the first step, you're looking for long pins with rounded and polished tips mounted on a flexible head. This removes the root cause of the pain and fear. Then we help them to make friends with the new tools, as they may need a little persuasion to understand that some brushes are friendlier than others!

TOP TIP

Don't use the following steps without changing tools first. It only prolongs the pain and fear.

1

Make sessions tiny

Two to three minutes, one area, done. A short session that ends well beats a longer one that ends in a battle, every single time. You're not trying to finish the coat. You're trying to end on a good note.

2

Pay well

Treats before, during, after. Or a lick mat while you work. You're not bribing them — you're building a new association, one rep at a time. High-value treats work better than their everyday kibble.

3

Stop before it gets hard

Always end while they're still relaxed, even if that means stopping earlier than you planned. Stopping early today is exactly what makes tomorrow's session possible. Finishing the job matters far less than how the session ends.

4

Pick your moment

A sleepy dog after a walk makes for a great session. A wired dog mid-zoomies doesn't. Same coat, same brush, different time — and it makes more difference than you'd think.

5

Go slow, stay calm

A calm, unhurried pace tells them there's no need to brace. Rushing to "just get it over with" does the opposite — it's one of the quickest ways to undo progress, however well-meaning it feels in the moment.

THEY TELL YOU BEFORE THEY MOVE

Four signs, in the order they usually come. Stop at the first one, not the last.

1. The head turn
away from the brush

2. The lip lick
with no food in sight

3. The freeze
stillness, not calm

4. The walk-off
the one you notice

None of this works in one session — and it isn't meant to.

No single brushing session rebuilds trust. What works is the same calm, positive experience happening again and again, until "brush comes out" stops meaning "brace for pain" and starts meaning, well, nothing much at all.

Some days will go better than others. Progress will not be linear. That's normal, not a setback. What matters is the pattern building underneath — a few good minutes today, a few good minutes tomorrow, quietly outweighing the bad experiences that started all this.

THE GOAL

A Doodle this relaxed around brush time.



WHAT MAKES IT WORSE

Holding them still, rushing through it, or brushing harder to force a tangle out — all of it deepens the brush-means-pain association, even when you're only trying to get it over with quickly for their sake.

The instinct to push through is natural. It's also usually the thing standing between this week's session and a better one next week.

The 5 spots they flinch at first

Some parts of your Doodle tangle faster than others and tend to be more sensitive to begin with. That combination is what makes them the spots most likely to trigger a head-turn, a lip-lick, or a flinch. Left too long between brushes, they're also where a tangle has the most time to tighten into something that really does hurt. Brushed little and often, they're no different from anywhere else on the coat.

1. Behind the Ears VERY HIGH RISK

Fine, soft hair plus constant movement. Usually the very first tangle your Doodle ever gets, and the easiest to miss, because it hides behind something cute.

2. The collar line HIGH RISK

The collar or harness rubs the same band of coat all day long. Slide it aside when you brush. And take it off when you're not out walking!

3. The tail HIGH RISK

Wagging generates friction. The base of the tail, where it meets the body, is the spot owners skip most.

4. The armpits VERY HIGH RISK

VERY HIGH RISK

Highest friction zone, often a little moist, tricky to brush. Tangles get missed here most.

5. The legs MEDIUM RISK

MEDIUM RISK

Always moving. Always in grass, mud and water. The feathering on the backs of the legs catches everything.



THE TWO MINUTE HABIT

Every day or two, go through all five spots with your fingers. Feel down to the skin. Two minutes, tops. It's the cheapest tangle-insurance a Doodle owner will ever get.

How to brush so it actually works

Here's a promise: ten minutes done right beats an hour done wrong. Every time. And it's gentler, too — because you're never dragging a brush blind over a spot that might already be matted underneath.



Line brushing.

Fancy name, simple idea:
brush in layers, not over the top.

1

Part a clean horizontal line

Use your free hand to part the coat in a clean, straight line, low on the section you're working. The hair near the skin is now exposed, and that's your target.

2

Brush the section you've exposed

Use light strokes from the skin out towards the tip, and don't press hard. Let the brush do the work. You're guiding it through the coat, not forcing it. Pressing down only drags on the skin, and it won't clear tangles any faster.

3

Move up. Part the next line.

Work your way up in rows, adding a little more coat each time, until you've been through the whole section. That's the entire method, and that's where the name comes from.

4

Hit a tangle? Slow down.

Work it from its outer edge inwards with short, light strokes, and never drag through it from above. You're teasing it apart, not ripping it out. The difference between a stroke they barely notice and one they remember.

STICK WITH IT

Brushed this way, you see what you're about to brush before the brush gets there — instead of finding a tangle the hard way, mid-stroke. That's what makes line brushing gentler, not just more thorough. It feels slower for the first week or so. Then it becomes faster than anything you did before, because you're not fighting the same hidden tangles — or the same flinching — over and over.

The 14-day trust rebuild

These two weeks aren't about getting the coat brushed. They're about changing what your dog expects when the brush comes out. Proving to them — one small session at a time — that the brush doesn't hurt anymore. A few minutes at a time is plenty. Do the stages in order, and don't skip ahead, even if they seem ready.

DAYS 1–3**Let them get used to seeing it**

Leave the brush on the floor where they walk past it. Once or twice a day, pick it up, give a treat, put it back down. Don't brush at all.

DAYS 4–6**One stroke, then stop**

When they're calm, do one light stroke on the shoulder, give a treat, and put the brush away. Twice a day. Stop after one stroke even if they seem happy for more.

DAYS 7–9**Build up to two minutes**

Brush the shoulders, back and sides only, using line brushing from the last chapter. Two minutes. Leave the tricky spots and any tangle you find for now, and make a note of where they are.

DAYS 10–12**Add one tricky spot**

Same areas, same two minutes, same method. Now add just one of the high-risk zones — whichever seems calmest to start with. Still leave the rest alone.

DAYS 13–14**A full short session**

Five minutes: the easy areas, then all five spots, then a comb check (more on this in the next chapter). If the comb catches, remember the spot and come back to it tomorrow instead of sorting it now.

HOW TO RUN IT

If a day goes badly, do that day again instead of moving on. The plan can wait. Pushing ahead can't undo a bad session, it can only add to it. Most dogs get through this faster than their owner expects, once they trust that you'll stop when they ask. By day 14 you're not after a dog who loves being brushed. You're after one who stays put when the brush appears. That's the moment the positive experiences start outweighing the one bad one that started all this. If they were really frightened before you started, run the same five stages over six weeks instead of two. Nothing changes but the pace.

Your Doodle's coat has four challenges

By now you know why brushing hurt, and what to do about it. But there's one more important thing: most brushes are only built for one part of the brushing job, which is exactly how the pain and fear started in the first place. A Doodle coat asks four different things of a brush, and one brush rarely does all four well. Whatever tools you own, make sure you have one that can handle every challenge well. One brush can't do all four, and the wrong one for the job is precisely what they've been pulling away from.

1

The main body brushing

The main body area needs a brush with a flexible head that bends and moves with them as you go, not one that stops dead the moment it meets resistance — and pins long enough to reach the undercoat, with rounded tips that don't scratch the skin.

2

The tricky spots: where they're most sensitive

Behind the ears, the collar line, armpits, legs and tail. These are the areas from chapter 4 — small, awkward, and the first to cause a flinch. They need a smaller brush that can actually get into the space, not a full-size one working at an angle it wasn't built for.

3

Beat the deepest tangles

Some tangles sit further down or have had time to felt. These need a brush with extra reach — longer pins that get all the way through in one pass, so you're not sawing back and forth over the same sore spot trying to work it loose.

4

The tangle-free test

This is the step most routines skip — and it's the one that matters most. After brushing, run a metal comb through the coat, all the way down to the skin. If it glides through cleanly, that section is genuinely tangle-free. If it catches, you've found something the brush missed — better to detangle it now, gently, than have it turn into tomorrow's flinch.

Your job vs. your groomer's job

Untangling a matted Doodle was never the groomer's job. They handle the cut and styling. When a coat turns up matted right down to the skin, a shave-down is often the only kind option left. The day-to-day work — getting down to the undercoat, keeping the 5 high-risk zones clear, checking with the comb — happens at home between grooming appointments. Do your bit well, and your groomer can do theirs well too.

THE ROUTINE

Most days

All 5 high-risk zones, a few minutes.

1-2 times weekly

The full body, followed by a comb check.

Before a grooming appointment

A full, thorough brush and comb check. Arrive tangle-free.

Start today. Two minutes.

Not sure which brushes your Doodle needs?

Take the quiz to find out.

TAKE THE 60-SECONDS QUIZ