

Dental Care

Your pet counts on you for protection

With major advances in treating serious infectious and other pet diseases, oral disease – most importantly periodontal or gum disease caused by the buildup of plaque and tartar – has become the number-one health problem for dogs. It's estimated that without proper dental care 80% of dogs will show signs of oral disease by age three. With your help, your pets can have healthy teeth and gums throughout their lives.

You simply need to provide them with a few things:

- A nutritious diet
- Chew treats such as rawhide "bones"
- Regular brushing at home
- Yearly dental checkups by a veterinarian



Good dental health begins with the proper diet

The wrong kinds of food can cause dental distress in pets. Feeding your dog a dry food rather than a moist, canned one will, through its mild abrasive action on the teeth, help remove the bacterial plaque that can harden into tartar. Dry food also provides adequate chewing exercise and gum stimulation. Avoid giving your pet sweets and table scraps as they may also increase plaque and tartar formation. Your vet may recommend the use of special dry foods designed to reduce plaque and tartar buildup, especially if your pet is prone to dental problems due to his breed or individual genetic history.

Brushing your pet's teeth

Dogs need to have their teeth brushed in order to eliminate the dental plaque that can cause tooth decay and the formation of tartar, which can lead to gum disease. You should begin a regular, daily brushing routine when your puppy is between six and eight weeks of age. Even older dogs can be trained to accept having their teeth brushed. You simply need to introduce the activity gradually and make the experience a positive one for your pet. Reassure and praise him profusely throughout the process and reward him with a very special treat when it's finished. Here's how it can be done:



Step 1

- Start by dipping a finger in beef bouillon for dogs.
- Rub this finger gently over your pet's gums and one or two teeth.
- Repeat until your pet seems fairly comfortable with this activity.



Step 2

- Gradually, introduce a gauze-covered finger and gently scrub the teeth with a circular motion.

Step 3

- Then, you can begin to use a toothbrush, either an ultra-soft model designed for people or a special pet tooth-brush or finger brush, which is a rubber finger covering with a small brush built in at its tip.

Step 4

- Finally, once your pet is used to brushing, introduce the use of pet toothpaste in liquid or paste form. Most of these contain chlorhexidine or stannous fluoride – ask your veterinarian for his recommendations. Don't use human toothpaste, as it can upset your pet's stomach. Your vet may also advise the use of an antiseptic spray or rinse after brushing.

Don't forget a yearly dental checkup

Doing your best to ensure that your dog receives the proper diet and regular brushing at home will help maintain his teeth and gums in top condition. To provide optimum dental care at home, you need to start with a clean bill of dental health. That's where your pet's veterinarian comes in.

He will give your pet a thorough examination of the entire oral cavity to determine whether there are any underlying problems and, especially important, tartar buildup. Brushing removes plaque but not tartar, so if your pet's teeth do have tartar, your veterinarian will have to remove it with a professional cleaning and polishing, usually accomplished under anaesthesia. After removing the tartar above and below the gum line, your veterinarian may treat your pet's teeth with fluoride and will provide you with instructions for home care and follow-up.

A few tips:

- Chew treats, including hard meat-protein biscuits and rawhide chews for dogs, can help remove plaque, and provide stimulation for the gums.
- Watch out for wood – throwing sticks to dogs or letting your cat pick up a piece of wood with his mouth can result in splinters and gum damage.
- Don't let your pet chew on hard materials like bones or stones. They can wear down, even break teeth, damage gums and lead to infection.

A few statistics:

- Kittens have their first 26 "milk" or deciduous teeth at 2 to 3 weeks of age. Their 30 permanent teeth begin erupting around 3 months.
- Cats have the fewest teeth of any common domestic mammal.
- Puppies develop their deciduous teeth at 2 weeks of age, with their 42 permanent teeth starting to appear at 3 months.