

Dental Home Care

Since periodontal disease is one of the most common infections in pets, it is important for you to realize what an integral part you can play in helping to prevent the disease.

While it is certainly recommended to start training a puppy or kitten at a very young age to accept home care efforts, even an older pet can be taught to tolerate the care. Each pet-owner relationship is different, so we realize that not every pet will allow having its teeth brushed daily, but we would like to encourage you to try the best you can. By providing regular home care, you can help slow down the deposits of plaque (with bacteria) and tartar that contribute to periodontal disease, infection, and tooth loss.

Brushing Teeth at Home

Never use human toothpaste for a pet as these contain sudsing agents that are not meant to be swallowed. Animal toothpaste comes in pet-preferred flavors (chicken, seafood, malt, etc) and is acceptable to swallow. Studies have shown that brushing three times a week was adequate to maintain healthy teeth and gums but daily brushing was needed to control existing gingivitis.

- Start out slowly and be gentle. Enjoy your pet and brush their teeth to interact with them. It takes time and patience to create a habit. Think about the reason you are brushing your pet's teeth.
- Get your pet more accustomed to have its head handled gently for short periods of time, with a "reward" after.
- Increase this contact to gently holding the muzzle closed with one hand while you lift the lips with your other hand. With cats and some dogs, even caressing the side of the closed mouth can be a more pleasant experience at first.
- Once they are calm with facial handling, using a cotton gauze or swab or even a small toothbrush and rub the outside of the lips, then even the tooth surfaces themselves, once you can lift the lips.
- You can progress from here by using a flavored veterinary toothpaste (let them choose the flavor, if you can!), and even building to a regular, circular brushing movement of a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- You do not need to clean the inner surface of your pet's teeth. Natural saliva clears this surface on its own.

Even with the best efforts, some pets won't tolerate brushing well, and don't do anything that could cause them to bite you or that would be overly stressful to them! Fortunately, all is not lost: some other options include prescription dental diets, dental chews, oral solutions, and drinking water additives, so determine what extent of home care you can provide your pet, and try your best.

Remember that even with meticulous home care, this is still just one part of a complete periodontal care program for your pet, which will also include professional periodontal cleanings when recommended by your veterinarian. But by minimizing the amount of plaque and tartar that build up on the tooth surfaces, you can decrease the amount of work and expense that will be needed during those visits. Another benefit may be early detection of other oral/dental problems, such as broken or discolored teeth, or even oral masses, because you are regularly examining your pet's mouth!