



Your Community Care Veterinary Center

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Brushing Your Pet's Teeth

Equally important to annual dental exams at your veterinarian's practice is home dental care, including brushing your pet's teeth every day if possible. AAHA recommends a technique for both younger and older animals, although it's easier to start brushing when your pet is young.

To introduce a fearful Fido or timid Tabby to the idea of dental care, start slowly and gradually. Dip a finger into beef bouillon (for dogs) or tuna water (for cats) and gently rub along your pet's gums and teeth. The most important area to focus on is the gum line (the crevice where the gums meet the teeth), where bacteria and food mix to form plaque. Focusing on the gum line, start at the front of the mouth, then move to the back upper and lower teeth and gum areas. Once your pet is okay with a little bit of touching, gradually introduce gauze over your finger and rub the teeth and gums in a circular fashion.

When your four-legged friend can handle the gauze, try brushing with a toothbrush specially designed for pets or a very soft, ultra-sensitive toothbrush designed for people. The bristles should be held at a 45-degree angle to the tooth surface and be moved in an oval motion. Scrub in the gum line, as this is where odor and infection begin. Gradually add special dog/cat toothpaste (flavored with meat or fish), but never use people toothpaste or baking soda, as both will upset your pet's stomach.

Use the following process to clean the inside surfaces of your pet's teeth:

1. Place your hand over your pet's muzzle from the top
2. Gently squeeze and push his lips on one side between the back teeth.
(This is done to keep his mouth open.)
3. Pull his head back gently so his mouth opens
4. Brush his teeth on the opposite side
5. Repeat this process for the other side

The entire process should only take a minute or two. If your dog or cat continues to resist, try gently wrapping him in a large bath towel with only his head sticking out. Above all, avoid overstraining and keep sessions short and positive. With plenty of praise and reassurance, your dental sessions can bring the two of you closer---a closeness that won't be marred by the perils of dog breath.

Home care can be improved by feeding your pet an unmoistened dry pet food and offering him hard biscuits after each meal. Both dry food and hard biscuits produce abrasion to help keep plaque to a minimum on the crown of each tooth.

AAHA encourages pet owners to regularly examine their pet's teeth for signs of periodontal disease, such as brownish colored teeth; swollen, red, or bleeding gums; persistent bad breath; loose teeth or loss of teeth; pus between the gums and teeth; broken teeth and any unusual growth in the mouth. Reluctance to eat, play with chew toys, or drink cold water are warning signs of periodontal or gum disease. Consult your veterinarian if you notice any of these signs in your pet.

For more information on pet dental care, read the [AAHA Dental Care Guidelines](#) article.