

How To Brush Your Pets Teeth

Pets are an important part of our lives for many years. As such, dental care is important to extend your pet's good health and quality years with you. Dental disease is the most common problem seen in our pet's population today. More than 85% of all dogs and cats presented to veterinarians are affected by dental problems. Periodontal disease is what causes bad breath as well as eventual tooth loss.

We recommend daily dental care at home for your pets, just like the rest of the family. It is best to begin home care at an early age (8-12 weeks) during puppy or kittenhood, but it is never too late. Visible tartar should be removed ultrasonically in a process known as scaling and polishing, just like when people go to the dentist. This makes your home care efforts easier and more effective. Always remember to make it fun!

Gathering Supplies:

Washcloth, toothbrush, or glove

Pet toothpaste (see products available in our hospital)

Week 1- Slowly Acquainting Your Pet With Mouth Care

Using your hand, gently open your pet's mouth and run your finger around his or her lips, lifting the lips, etc. This should begin for just 30 seconds on day one and progressively to a couple of minutes by the end of the week. Reward your pet with a small treat at the end of each session (no "people food" please).

Week 2- Introducing Toothbrush, Washcloth, or Glove (Without Toothpaste)

This week, use either a wet washcloth wrapped around your index finger, wet toothbrush, or preferably the lufa glove we showed during the exam that can be bought at dollar stores or local markets. Lift lips, massage the outer surfaces only of upper and lower teeth using a back and forth motion. Do this for 30 seconds on day one, progressive up to three minutes by the end of the week.

Week 3- Add Toothpaste, Extend Brushing Time

This week use your dental cleaning instrument and now add $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of toothpaste to brush the outer surfaces only of upper and lower teeth in back and forth motion.

A Few Pointers:

- Do not rush the process or else the pet may become resistant
- Always treat at the end of each session, making it enjoyable. PRAISE HIGHLY.
- If your pet shows an indication of aggression (growling, bearing teeth, biting, scratching, etc.) stop immediately. Call the hospital for further professional advice.
- NEVER use human toothpaste. Vomiting is common if this is done.
- Cleaning at home will reduce the frequency of professional care needed.
- Both Doctor Reister and Knopsnyder recommend raw bones to help with dental disease. Pets should only be allowed to have the bone for a week at a time. Pets that have diarrhea or stomach problems after eating raw bones should not be given them again. You also should not give raw bones to pets in multiple pet households if they compete aggressively for the bone.