

Introducing Your Pet to Dental Hygiene

Dental calculus (tartar) is composed of various mineral salts, organic material, food particles and bacteria. In the early stages of accumulation, the material is soft (plaque), but it later hardens and adheres to the teeth. Continual accumulation causes inflammation of the gums and eventually recession of the gums and loose teeth. The breath becomes very odorous and the mouth becomes a dangerous source of infection.

Make brushing your pet's teeth a positive experience and your pet may come to welcome this procedure. Let your children become involved. Brushing is a normal idea to them; therefore, brushing their pet's teeth makes sense.

Pavlovian conditioning with treats may be the answer to quick and easy teeth brushing. Start by rubbing your animal around the head and facial area then giving your pet a treat. Do this every day around the same time for a week. Your pet will associate their head and face being touched with receiving a treat. Gradually slip a finger under the lip and gently rub the outer surfaces of the teeth, then rub the head and give a treat.

As you gain the pet's confidence you can start using a finger brush or a soft bristled brush to provide a level of dental hygiene that isn't painful. It will probably take one month to reach this stage. Don't be discouraged; it may take longer. Just remember to be gentle yet quick and make teeth brushing a positive experience. Then you can brush the entire mouth using a back-and-forth motion. Don't worry about brushing the tips or the insides of your pet's teeth because most of the lesions will occur on the outer surfaces of the teeth and their tongue usually removes a lot of plaque on the inside of the teeth.

Once your animal becomes comfortable with that you can introduce the toothpaste. Allowing your pet to lick the toothpaste off of your hand is the best way to introduce the taste. This also creates a positive association with brushing because the animal will consider the toothpaste to be a treat, this is why we use poultry flavored paste.

Once your animal is used to the toothpaste can start using a toothbrush. Place the toothbrush along the gum line and rub the tooth in a circular or back-and-forth motion. Start from the upper-back of the mouth and work your way toward the front. To brush your animal's lower teeth you will have to open their mouth a little. Just gently tilt their head backward while holding onto their upper jaw. It may take some time for your pet to let you brush all of his/her teeth. It is recommended that you focus on the bigger teeth until your animal feels more comfortable with the entire mouth being brushed. This could take several days to a few weeks. When you are brushing your animal's teeth it is recommended that you brush for 30 seconds on each side.

Wash your hands and the toothbrush after every use. And use a different toothbrush for each animal in your house.



DOGS

Puppies develop 28 temporary teeth by about 2 to 3 weeks of age. Their 42 permanent adult teeth emerge between 4 to 6 months of age.

CATS

Kittens develop 26 temporary teeth by about 2 to 3 weeks of age. They develop 30 permanent teeth by about 5 to 6 months of age.



Good Oral Hygiene at Home



Brushing Teeth

- Brushing your pet's teeth daily is the most effective way to decrease plaque and tartar accumulation for your pet. This is the best method for preventing dental disease in your pet. It is easier than it sounds because you only need to brush the outer tooth surfaces. This means you do NOT have to pry the mouth open while brushing the teeth.
- Use a children's soft toothbrush or a veterinary recommended pet toothbrush.
- Use a flavored toothpaste made for animals (C.E.T. poultry flavor for dogs and seafood flavor for cats), allowing the pet to lick the paste for a week or two prior to actually brushing. DO NOT use human toothpaste, as it irritates pets' stomachs.

C.E.T. Oral Rinse

- This can be applied with a Q-tip (especially useful in hard to treat cats) or with the supplied applicator.
- This should be used daily and help to reduce the bacteria that form plaque, the precursor of tartar.
- This is a useful strategy for pets when brushing is not feasible.

Purina DH and other Dental Diets

DH is a special diet designed to reduce the formation of plaque and tartar. The kibble is structured in such a way that when bitten it provides a cleansing action. Use of this food is equivalent to brushing once a week.

Other Strategies and Information

- C.E.T. Chews, Purina Chewz, VeggieDent Chews and feline Greenies can also be used, but only as a partial preventative.
- Chewing on hard food or Milk Bone Biscuits is of limited value in preventing tartar and adds additional calories to the diet.
- We do **NOT** recommend giving your pet real bones or nylon bones to chew because of the increased chance of molar tooth fracture.
- Remember that there is no perfect chew toy for your pet. Supervision should be provided whenever your pet is given chew toys. A good rule to follow is that dogs should never chew on anything harder than their teeth.

Plan for the Future

- Your veterinarian will discuss the value of a complete oral exam during your pet's next wellness exam. Depending on how you are doing with homecare, an Oral Assessment and Treatment may be recommended.

Additional Online Dental Resources

- www.monroevets.com
- www.toothvet.ca
- www.dentalvet.com
- www.oralatp.com
- www.avdc.org
- <http://www.purinaveterinarydiets.com/Product/DHDentalHealthDogFood.aspx>
- <http://www.purinaveterinarydiets.com/Product/DHDentalHealthCatFood.aspx>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSh9c9iGSTs>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAImhEg_5bo



By keeping your pet's teeth and mouth healthy, you will help your him or her live a longer, healthier life.