

Brushing Teeth & Home Dental Care

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Brushing your dog's teeth should not be a chore for you or your dog. Instead, it should be an enjoyable time for both of you. If you take things slowly at the beginning and give lots of praise, you and your dog will start looking forward to your brushing sessions. But first, we need to gather together what we will need.

Toothpastes and rinses

There are many pet toothpastes on the market today. Make sure you use a pet toothpaste. Toothpastes designed for people can upset your dog's stomach. Pet toothpastes may contain several different active ingredients. Various veterinary dentists have recommended those toothpastes, gels, and rinses that contain chlorhexidine, hexametaphosphate, or zinc gluconate. For dogs with periodontal disease, fluoride treatments or toothpastes may be prescribed by your veterinarian. (Please do not use any human fluoride containing toothpastes on your pet.) Flavored toothpastes can make toothbrushing more acceptable to pets.



Toothbrushes, sponges, and pads

The real benefit of toothbrushing comes from the mechanical action of the brush on the teeth. Various brushes, sponges and pads are available. The choice of what to use depends on the health of your dog's gums, the size of your dog's mouth, and your ability to clean the teeth.

Use toothbrushes designed specifically for pets – they are smaller, ultra-soft, and have a somewhat different shape. Finger toothbrushes that do not have a handle, but fit over your finger, may be easier for some people to use. Pet toothbrushes are available through our company, your veterinarian, or some pet stores. For some dogs, starting out with dental sponges or pads may be helpful since they are more pliable. Dental sponges have a small sponge at the end of a handle, and are disposable. They are softer than brushes. Dental pads can help remove debris from the teeth and gums but do not provide the mechanical action that brushes do.

Where to begin

Number one, this should be fun for you and your dog. Be upbeat and take things slowly. Do not overly restrain your dog. Keep sessions short and positive. Be sure to praise your dog throughout the process. Give yourself a pat on the back, too! You are doing a great thing for your dog!

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2. The next step is to have your dog become comfortable with having something placed against his teeth and gums. Apply a small amount of paste to your finger and gently rub it on one of the large canine teeth in the front of the mouth. These are the easiest teeth for you to get at and will give you some easier practice. Be sure to praise your dog and give a tasty treat or other special reward (e.g., playing ball).

- After your dog is used to the toothpaste, and having something applied to his teeth, get him used to the toothbrush or dental sponge you will be using routinely. We need to get your dog used to the consistency of these items, especially the bristles on a brush. So, let your dog lick the toothpaste off of the brush so he gets used to the texture. Again, praise your dog when he licks the paste and give a really great treat or other reward. Continue this step for about a week, making sure your dog readily licks the paste off of the brush.



- Now your dog is used to the toothbrush and toothpaste and having something in his mouth. So the next step is to start brushing. Talk to your dog in a happy voice during the process and praise your dog at the end. Lift the upper lip gently and place the brush at a 45° angle to the gumline. Gently move the brush back



and forth. At first, you may just want to brush one or both upper canine teeth. You do not need to brush the inside surface of the teeth (the side towards the tongue). The movement of the tongue over the inside surfaces keeps them relatively free of plaque. Be sure to praise your dog, end on a good note and give a tasty treat or other great reward.



- When your dog accepts having several teeth brushed, slowly increase the number of teeth you are brushing. Again, by making it appear to be a game, you both will have fun doing it.

For more help, see our video on [How to Clean Your Dog's Teeth](#).

How often?

Certainly, the more often you brush the better. Always aim for daily dental care for your dog, just as you aim for daily dental care for yourself. The hardest thing about home dental care for dogs is just getting started. Once you have done it for a while, it just becomes part of your daily routine. If you cannot brush daily, brushing every other day will remove the plaque before it has time to mineralize. This will still have a positive effect on your dog's oral health.

I have developed a habit of brushing my dog's teeth after I am done brushing mine. I talk to my dog, through the procedure, praise her when we are done, and then give her a treat to chew on. Now when she hears me brushing my teeth, she comes into the bathroom wagging, and waits for her turn.

Other dental care items

Water-piks: A water-pik-type dental system has been developed for dogs. It works on the same principle as similar devices for people. Chlorhexidine is added to the water to kill the bacteria in the mouth, and the water stream removes the plaque. This may be especially useful for some pets with gum disease, who bleed from the gums if a brush is used.

Food: Studies show that hard kibbles are slightly better at keeping plaque from accumulating on the teeth. There is a veterinary dentist-approved food on the market called t/d made by Hill's, the Science Diet people. Research studies have shown that pets eating this food have less plaque and calculus build-up. This food is available through your veterinarian.

Avoid feeding dogs table scraps or sweet treats because they can increase the build up of plaque and tartar, and can lead to other health problems.

Toys: Mechanical removal of plaque can be accomplished by using toys such as Plaque Attacker dental toys, rope toys, or rawhide chips. Do not use toys that are abrasive and can wear down the teeth. If your dog is a very aggressive chewer, choose toys that are not so hard that he could possibly break a tooth on them. You may need to look for toys he cannot get his mouth around. Rawhide or other chews that soften as the dog chews are another option. Always supervise your dog when he is chewing on a toy.



Treats: There are some dental chews on the market that are specifically designed to help control plaque and tartar buildup. Look for dental chews accepted by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC).