

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. QVH recommends a technique for both younger and older animals, although it's easier to start brushing when your pet is young.

Introducing dental care to your pet

To introduce a pet to the idea of dental care, start slowly and gradually. Dip a finger into beef bouillon and gently rub along your dog'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 pet 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 pet toothpaste, ***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 (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 pet continues to resist, try gently wrapping him in a large bath towel with only his head sticking out. **Above all, avoid stress and keep sessions short and positive.**

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.

Proper dental care prevents disease

Dental care is one of the most commonly overlooked areas of pet health care; however, it is necessary to provide optimum health and quality of life. Diseases of the oral cavity, if left untreated, are often painful and can lead to more serious health problems including heart, lung and kidney disease.

QVH 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 to schedule a dental exam.

There are two critical components of your pet's veterinary dental care: oral examinations and dental cleanings. Veterinary dental care begins at the puppy and kitten life stage. As your pet ages, your veterinarian will look for developmental anomalies, the accumulation of plaque and tartar, periodontal disease and oral tumors. Veterinarians can perform a basic oral examination on patients that are awake. However, when a cleaning is required, your pet will need to be induced under general anesthesia wherein a thorough examination will be done prior to the cleaning. Dental cleanings performed while your pet is awake is not only dangerous for the team member performing the cleaning but dangerous to your pet as well. When pets receive inadequate dental care commonly seen during a non-anesthetic dental procedure, they are more likely to develop periodontal disease.

