

Dental Home Care for Dogs and Cats

Professional dental care is only one part of taking care of your pet's oral health for the long term. Like ourselves, pets benefit most from daily dental care in between professional visits. With a little patience, many pets can be successfully introduced to dental home care.

What should I do and how often?

Once daily toothbrushing with a bristled toothbrush is the gold standard for bacterial plaque removal and is your main goal. Other dental home care, including dental diets, chew products, water additives, and barrier sealants that although are not as effective are still very helpful. Ideally, you will combine toothbrushing with other methods to reduce plaque in as many ways as possible.

There are so many products! Which one do I choose?

There are no mandatory or standardized testing requirements for pet dental products available for sale. The Veterinary Oral Health Council (www.vohc.org) is an independent body that reviews research done by companies on their own dental care products. Although only the results of the research are reviewed, it is a good place to start for possible products to use. Talk to your veterinarian to get recommendations that are best for your pet.

How to introduce toothbrushing

The key to teaching toothbrushing is patience. Slowly work through each step below and be sure to provide lots of praise and positive reinforcement (treats or attention) each time your pet complies. Only when your pet is comfortable with one step, should you move on to the next. This process could take as long as several months for some pets, so don't be discouraged!

- 1) Oral health exam:** Have your veterinarian check your pet's mouth – broken teeth, deep infection around teeth, or resorption of teeth can all be painful. If you try to brush painful teeth, your pet will learn to associate toothbrushing with discomfort and will not allow it.
- 2) Sitting still and face touching:** Have your pet sit quietly with you. Good times to try this are after long walks or play sessions, or at night when you're getting ready for bed and they are already calm.
- 3) Tooth touching:** Introduce gently touching the teeth with piece of gauze, or even the corner of a face cloth to wipe along the outer teeth surfaces.
- 4) Introduce a bristled brush:** A soft-bristled toothbrush is ideal because the bristles flare under the gumline where the bacteria do their major damage. Focus on the outer surfaces of the teeth because this is the most practical, and where the plaque accumulates the most.