

HOME DENTAL CARE FOR CATS AND DOGS



Preventative care

Keeping your pet's teeth clean is one of the most effective ways to prevent pain, infection, and dental procedures. Daily brushing can significantly reduce plaque, tartar buildup, and bad breath—and add healthy years to your pet's life.

Dental treats, bars and foods are also helpful and are discussed on the next page.

Equipment you'll need:

- Toothbrush: use a soft-bristled child's toothbrush, readily available from the supermarket
- Pantyhose or a gauze swab over your finger also works!
- Pet-specific toothpaste can be helpful for improving your pet's acceptance. Never use human toothpaste.
- Patience! Introduce the new routine slowly. It needs to be a positive experience for you both, or it will not be sustainable.



Toothbrushing works

Brushing your pet's teeth at home is the best defence against dental disease. Yes, cats too!

Just like people, dogs and cats develop plaque that calcifies into tartar. Over time, this can lead to:

- Bad breath
- Inflamed or bleeding gums (gingivitis)
- Chronic infection of the bone and soft tissues supporting the tooth (periodontitis)
- Chronic pain
- Inability to groom effectively (especially cats)

Daily brushing removes the biofilm – the sticky bacterial film which is the beginning of plaque formation.

Step by step

1. Choose the right time!

Pick a calm moment when your dog or cat is relaxed—not right before a walk or mealtime.

2. Introduce the toothpaste

Let your pet lick a small amount from your finger. Make it a positive experience with praise.

3. Allow them to be comfortable

Gently lift the lip and rub your finger along the gumline for a few seconds. Repeat daily for a few days before introducing a brush.

4. Start brushing

- Use small circular motions.
- You do not need to scrub – just gentle movements as you would for your own teeth
- Focus on the outer surfaces of the teeth (most plaque builds up here). Don't forget the canines and incisors (dogs especially)!
- Aim for 30–60 seconds per side; for cats, even 15–30 seconds is beneficial.

Praise and reward! The aim is to make it something your pet looks forward to every day.



What else can I do?

1. Dental Chews

Daily dental chews can help reduce plaque and tartar through mechanical action. Some dental chews also contain antibacterial agents.

Benefits:

- Helps slow tartar buildup
- Freshens breath
- Easy to incorporate into routine
- Often enjoyable for pets

Choose the size that's appropriate for your pet. Don't be tempted to cut them in half! Always supervise.



Used together, dental chews and foods can provide additional helpful cleaning options.

What about bones?

There is a temptation to feed dogs and cats bones, because it seems like a "natural" thing for them to chew on. Unfortunately, bones (particularly long weight-bearing bones) are very dense, and are responsible for a high percentage of tooth fractures. Did you know that up to 75% of adult wolves live with fractured, painful teeth? Talk with your vet about ways of decreasing the risks, but on the whole, bones are best avoided.



2. Dental foods

Dental diets are helpful in addition to brushing, or for pets who won't tolerate brushing.

- Dental prescription diets are specially designed to reduce plaque and tartar. The larger kibble size encourages chewing - they are not swallowed whole as some smaller kibbles are.
- Fiber matrix means they cannot be cracked in half - the chewing teeth must bite into the kibble.
- For full benefit, feed as the primary diet.
- Not all dental diets are appropriate for every pet (especially those with medical conditions)

Ask your vet before switching foods.

3. Topical products

Oral antiseptics are most effective when applied directly to teeth (or added to drinking water) **after** toothbrushing. Removing the biofilm from teeth with brushing or chewing first is the crucial step here.

What works best?

The most effective dental routine combines:

- ✓ Daily brushing (best protection)
- ✓ Dental chews and/or dental diet (helpful)
- ✓ Topical products (somewhat helpful)
- ✓ Professional cleanings as recommended by your vet. Some pets will need this annually.

Check the Veterinary Oral Health Council website for detailed analyses of the different dental health products: <https://vohc.org>