



Fondren Pet Care Center

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DENTAL HOME CARE

BRUSH MY PET'S TEETH?

Yes, this is one of the most important health maintenance things you can do for your pet. Dental disease is the number one diagnosed disease in dogs and cats. There are several reasons that homecare is so important now compared to past generations. First, animals (like humans) are living longer, giving the bacteria more time to cause disease. Increase in ownership of small breed dogs that are much more susceptible to periodontal disease increases the overall incidence. In addition, certain pure bred dogs and cats are more susceptible to periodontal disease than are most mixed breed pets.

The "Gold Standard" of home care is tooth brushing. This is the most effective means of controlling plaque and periodontal disease in your pet. The following is a guide to starting to brush your pet's teeth.

- 1. START YOUNG** — The sooner you start your pet on its oral health care, the easier it will be to do. I recommend that all pets have their mouth handled from very young age to get them used to it. You can start brushing young too, but it really isn't necessary until they are about 5 months.
- 2. GO SLOWLY** — Don't push the procedure on your pet. Make the experience as positive as possible. If you force this on your pet, they will resent it. Start with just handling the mouth for a short period, then gently lift the lips and massage the gums, finally, introduce the brush, possibly by allowing the pet to gently chew on it first.
- 3. MAKE IT POSITIVE** — If you link this behavior to positive things like walks, playtime, and especially food (either dinner or a favorite treat), you will increase the likelihood of patient acceptance.
- 4. TOOLS** — All you need to get started is a toothbrush. There are various brushes designed for pets. I especially like the small circular ended one for cats. Buy one appropriate for your pet's mouth. If you would prefer, a soft child's toothbrush will work well too. There are many options for toothpaste. You CANNOT use a human toothpaste, because they contain ingredients that can make your pet sick if swallowed. There are numerous veterinary products available, they usually add some enzymatic cleaner, and increase the palatability of the tooth brush. Depending on your pet's oral health status your veterinarian may recommend an antiseptic rinse or fluoride, ask your veterinarian what is right for your pet.
- 5. TECHNIQUE** — Use a circular motion with the brush at a 45 degree angle to the gum line. Use a small amount of veterinary toothpaste, but replace it often. Brush all of your pet's teeth in succession. For the rear teeth, you can usually just place the brush in under the lips. The rear lower teeth present a small problem since the upper teeth cover them. If your pet is very good, you can try to open his or her mouth slightly (1/2" or so) by placing a finger between the jaws in the area just behind the upper canine. The insides of

the teeth are a little bit trickier. Try to open the mouth slightly and brush the inside of the teeth. If you can't do it, it's ok, as most periodontal disease occurs on the outside surface of the teeth. One exception to this is on the inside surface of the upper canines in small breed dogs. They can get very bad periodontal disease in this area for some reason. If it progresses, it can invade the nasal cavity. If your pet really resists brushing the inside of the mouth, ask your veterinarian if it is critical for your pet

6. FREQUENCY — Once a day would be ideal as plaque is formed within 24 hours, however for most owners this is unrealistic. It has been reported that if you brush your pet's teeth 3 times a week you will reduce plaque by 90%, and if you can only manage once a week by 75%. A good rule is at least three days a week, unless we are treating active periodontal disease in which case increased frequency is required.

7. ONGOING CARE — Just like you, even though brushing greatly improves periodontal health, it does not completely eliminate the need for professional cleanings, however it should decrease the frequency. When you brush your pet's teeth, you can catch potential problems early. If you start seeing tan/brown buildup on the teeth or blood on the toothbrush this means that the periodontal disease is starting again and your pet is due for a cleaning. If you notice and loose teeth, swellings or growths, broken teeth, or anything else, it is time to visit your veterinarian. Finally, if your pet stops allowing you to brush, it may be a sign of oral pain, and you should see your veterinarian.

8. QUESTIONS? — Call or visit Fondren Pet Care Center, or visit www.avds-online.org.

If your pet just won't allow the brushing or if you don't have time, there are some other methods. There are numerous tartar control diets available that will help clean the teeth. Hills T/D is the most effective at preventing periodontal disease. It is only available through your veterinarian. It comes in a cat form, as well as two sizes for dogs. This is balanced enough to be the sole food for your pet (as long as your pet has no other health problems that require a special diet, please consult your veterinarian). In addition, there are various tartar control chews and biscuits that have varying levels of effectiveness.