

Regular brushing and flossing improve our breath, teeth, and overall well-being by reducing the likelihood of cavities, gum infections, dental pain, and other health issues. When it comes to our pets, a daily routine of dental care can provide similar health benefits. Harmful bacteria in the mouth can spread through the bloodstream to other organs, such as the heart, liver, and kidneys, and contribute to diseases of internal organs. Good oral care can extend the length and quality of life.

Just like people, pets can develop plaque, which leads to tartar buildup.

Plaque: the sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth.

If you forget to brush your teeth before going to bed at night, you will almost certainly ‘feel’ the plaque as the sticky stuff on your teeth the following morning. Plaque carries bacteria that can damage tooth enamel and lead to cavity development. If plaque is not removed regularly by brushing and flossing, it hardens to create **calculus** (also known as **tartar**). As tartar builds up, it can lead to gum erosion and gum infections. Calculus/tartar cannot be removed with a toothbrush. Only a veterinary dental professional can remove tartar from your dog or cat with teeth cleaning.

Small Breeds and Dental Disease

Several factors determine the amount of plaque and tartar build-up on your pet's teeth, including their age, breed, genetics, the amount of saliva produced, and their diet. Small and toy breeds such as Yorkies, Poodles, Chihuahuas, Maltese are more prone to dental issues. Small breed dogs are at a higher risk than large breed dogs. This is because their teeth are relatively large for the size of their mouth. Small dogs have much less bone around the roots, so the teeth are very crowded. Bone loss occurs rapidly with infection and inflammation of the supporting structures of the teeth. Small-breed dogs have so little bone around the teeth that they cannot tolerate this loss as easily as the large breeds.

As pets age and mature, plaque accumulation leads to tartar build-up, and often, there are gum infections that can cause considerable pain and discomfort. Unfortunately, our pets cannot tell us if they have sore, rotten, or loose teeth. If you can smell a nasty mouth odor from your pet's mouth, there is most likely an infection involving one or more teeth. When this occurs, their appetite may fall off since it can be very painful to chew and eat. Some dogs and cats will drool excessively, another red flag of an oral infection.

What about food/treats?

Dry dog or cat kibble will not necessarily keep your dog's teeth clean, unless you are using a prescription dental diet such as **Hill's t/d or Purina DH (both foods can be ordered through our website)**. Hills also makes a Specialty “Oral Care” for dogs and cats.

Veggie-Dent Tartar Control treats do a great job of keeping teeth cleaner and their breath fresher and less offensive. These dental treats are plant-based, gluten-free, non-GMO, and contain no artificial ingredients or chemicals. Veggie-Dents also include a prebiotic (think of a prebiotic as 'fertilizer' for your beneficial gut bacteria) to help with digestion.

Choose Products with the VOHC Seal

The Veterinary Oral Health Council recognizes products that meet a set of standards for pet oral health. Regular use of products with the VOHC seal could reduce the severity of periodontal disease. Visit www.VOHC.org for further information.

How often should I brush my pet's teeth?

The gold standard is to brush daily. At the very least, try brushing your pet's teeth every other day to prevent plaque formation. However, it does require cooperation on their part, and that won't happen overnight.

Tips:

- Practice at the same time every day
- Reward with a treat
- Gradually get the dog or cat used to the toothpaste before introducing a brush or a wipe.
- Dab the paste on the gum tissue and praise and reward with a treat and then gradually do more and more.
- Be patient, don't rush it, and don't force it!

*Many pets need professional dental cleaning to keep their teeth healthy. Your full-service clinic and some spay-neuter clinics offer professional dental cleanings.

Only use a toothpaste made for pets!

Do NOT use human toothpaste as our pastes have fluoride in them which is toxic to pets. There are a number of different flavored toothpastes available for pets that can make brushing more agreeable and rewarding. Try poultry flavored (if your pet does not have a food allergy), or vanilla mint.

Toothbrush

You can try to use a human toothbrush on a big dog or a toddler toothbrush on a smaller dog. I'm not a big fan of the finger tip toothbrush for pets because the surface area is minimal. It is important to brush the surface where the gingiva meets the tooth (where the gum meets the tooth), which is where bacteria and food accumulate and cause problems.

ProDen Dental wipes can be used after meals to clean your pet's teeth. For some small dogs, the wipes work better than a toothbrush.

While not always easy to accomplish, the reward of keeping your pet's teeth clean can make a huge difference in the quality of their life.