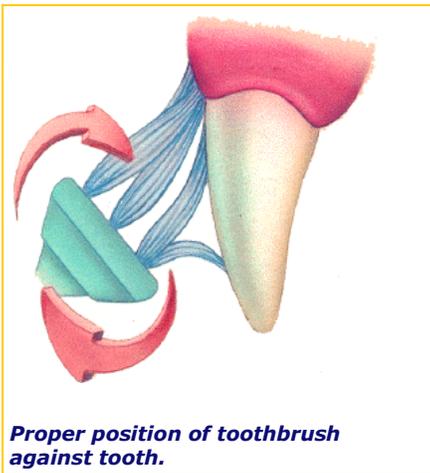


## Dental Home Care

### Why should I brush my dog's or cat's teeth?

Daily removal of plaque is the key to an oral hygiene program. Unless your pet's teeth are brushed daily, plaque, which is an accumulation of bacteria, will build up at the gum line. Eventually calculus forms, further irritating the gums, then infection progresses to loosen and destroy the attachment of the tooth. In addition to loose teeth, infection under the gum line can spread to the liver, kidneys, and heart.

### A Guide to Tooth Brushing



### How do I brush my pet's teeth?

*Step one--pick an appropriate pet toothbrush.* Buy a child or adult ADA (American Dental Association) approved toothbrush with soft bristles, depending on the size of your pet.

*Step two--pick an appropriate pet toothpaste.* Never use a human toothpaste. Always choose a pet toothpaste. Rather than placing the paste on top of the brush, incorporate it between the bristles. This allows the paste to spend the most time next to the teeth and gums.

*Step three--get the brush with paste into your pet's mouth to get all the teeth brushed.* Most dogs accept brushing if they are approached in a gentle manner. If you can start when they are young, it's quite easy, but even older dogs and cats will accept the process. Start slowly; initially, you may only need to spend 10 - 15 seconds every day to try and accustom your pet to the process. You can use a washcloth or piece of gauze to wipe the teeth, front and back in the same manner you will eventually be using the toothbrush. Do this once or twice daily for about two weeks and your pet should be familiar with the approach. Then take the pet toothbrush, soak it in warm water and start brushing daily for several days. When your pet accepts this brushing, add the pet toothpaste.

Most attention should be given to the outside of the upper teeth. The toothbrush bristles should be placed at the gum margin where the teeth and gums meet at a 45 degree angle. The movement should be in an oval pattern. Be sure to gently place the bristle ends into the area around the base of the tooth as well as into the space between the teeth. Ten short back and forth motions should be completed, then the brush moved to a new location. Cover three to four teeth at a time. Brushing the entire mouth should take 30 - 60 seconds. *Studies have shown that brushing three times a week was adequate to maintain healthy teeth and gums but daily brushing was needed to control existing gingivitis.*

In summary, home dental care should include daily brushing using an enzymatic pet toothpaste. Taking an active role in the care of your pet's dental care will help reduce dental disease, bad breath and potential life threatening heart and kidney disease. Everyone wins!

Feel free to discuss these different treatments with our staff at the Forest Park Veterinary Clinic to determine the best options for you and your pet.

## **Do's and Don'ts of Brushing Your Pet's Teeth**

*Don't* use human toothpaste on your pet.

*Do* use a toothbrush without any paste at first so that your pet may get used to the brush in the mouth first.

*Don't* attempt to clean the inner surface of your pet's teeth. Saliva naturally cleans this surface.

*Do* try to perform dental home care at least once daily.

*Don't* perform dental home care during the first week after a full dentistry in the hospital as your pet's gums may be tender.

*Don't* consider dental home care as an alternative to full dental cleaning if your pet has advanced dental disease.

## **Home Care Products**

The Veterinary Oral Health Council is a group that awards its seal of approval to dental products showing scientific evidence of plaque and tartar retardation. See a list of the VOHC's approved products. ([vohc.org](http://vohc.org))

### *Toothpaste and Brushing*

Just as with your own teeth, nothing beats brushing. The fibers of the toothbrush are able to reach between teeth and under gums to pick out tiny deposits of food. A toothbrush acts as a tiny scrub brush for the best possible cleaning. Finger brushes are available and are smaller for puppies and kittens as well as small adult dogs and cats.

Never use a human toothpaste for a pet as these contain sudsing agents that are not meant to be swallowed in quantity. Animal toothpastes come in pet-preferred flavors (chicken, seafood, and malt) in addition to the more human-appreciated mint. All are expected to be swallowed.

### *Dental Wipes, Rinses and Pads*

Some animals will not tolerate brushing but are more amenable to disinfecting wipes or pads. These products will wipe off plaque deposits from the surface of the tooth and, though they lack the ability to pick food particles out of the gum socket, they are probably the next best thing to brushing and, like brushing, these products are best used daily.

### *Dental Treats*

For many people, doing anything inside their pet's mouth on a regular basis is simply never going to happen. Fortunately, all is not lost: chewing on a proper dental chew can reduce plaque by up to 69%. This may not be as good as brushing but it certainly beats doing nothing. There are many products available for both dogs and cats.

### *Greenies*

This particularly popular chew treat has generated some recent controversy and deserves some special mention. Original Greenies were made with wheat gluten that dissolved slowly in the stomach. Some pets swallowed large chunks of a Greenie, the Greenie failed to dissolve in the stomach and intestinal obstruction resulted. Some deaths were reported. Since then, the Greenie has been reformulated using soy instead of wheat. The new Greenie is actually flexible and its manufacturer feels past problems have been resolved. The new formulation came out mid-2006 and is available in both canine and feline treats.

### *Dental Diets*

There is a common misconception that simply feeding a kibbled diet will protect the teeth from dental disease. Consider what it would be like to attempt to replace brushing your own teeth with eating crunchy foods and it is easy to see how ineffective this method would be. When it comes to pet foods, much of the kibble is swallowed whole and not chewed at all.

There is more to a dental diet than simple kibbling. Effective dental diets on the market today use several techniques to help reduce plaque: kibbles are large, so the pet must chew them before swallowing them. These diets are high in fiber, which means the kibbles do not shatter when chewed but instead the tooth sinks into the kibble, which allows some plaque to be mechanically scrubbed away. The large kibbles may pose an acceptance problem for the pet leading the owner to use them as treats or mixed with other kibbles. The smaller the percentage of the diet these kibbles represent, the less benefit will be reaped. It is also important to realize that these diets are most helpful in cleaning the molars and premolars (i.e. the chewing teeth) and are much less likely to help the canines (fangs) or incisors.