

Brushing Your Pets Teeth

It is estimated that over 2/3 of dogs over the age of three have periodontal disease, an inflammation or infection of the tissues surrounding the teeth. Periodontal disease starts as gingivitis caused by plaque and often progresses to involve the bony tooth sockets. Left untreated, periodontal disease can lead to painful tooth loss, bone loss, kidney disfunction, and heart complications

It is ideal to brush your dog's teeth daily. For many dogs, once brushing becomes a part of their routine they will begin to expect and enjoy it. Brushing twice a week is helpful if your schedule cannot accommodate daily brushing.

"It is best to teach your dog to accept tooth brushing is while he or she is still a puppy."

Commercial toothbrushes are available that are specifically designed for use in dogs. These include:

- brushes with angled handles,
- brushes with multiple heads (so that you can simultaneously brush the inside, outside and top surfaces of the tooth),
- small brushes that fit comfortably in your hand
- finger toothbrushes (designed to fit over the tip of your finger).
- For some dogs, it is acceptable to use a very soft toothbrush designed for use in human babies.

The type of toothbrush you use depends a little on the size of your dog and a little of your own dexterity. Many pet owners find it easier to use a finger brush, especially when just beginning to brush their dog's teeth. Check with your veterinarian if you are uncertain of which brush to use.

Regardless of the type of toothbrush you use, it is important to be gentle and go slowly as it is easy to accidentally poke the tip of the toothbrush against the gums and cause some irritation.

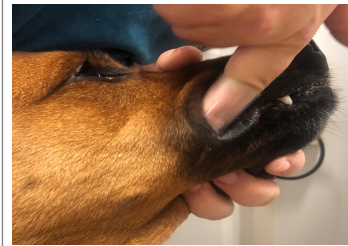
Pet toothpaste is available in a number of different flavors that are appetizing to dogs, including poultry, beef, malt and mint. By using a product that tastes good, your dog will be more likely to enjoy the whole experience. Remember Human toothpastes contain ingredients that should not be swallowed. If it is swallowed, it can cause an upset stomach or digestive disturbances. Some human toothpaste contains high levels of sodium which may even injure your dog.

To start brushing your pets' teeth, first, position your pet in a comfortable location where you can safely handle your pet. Be mindful of your positioning, it is best to come from behind your pet for brushing, instead of seated in front of your pet. Then, apply a small amount of toothpaste to the toothbrush.



Gently raise your dog's lips on one side, then in a circular motion, begin brushing their teeth.

Work your way around the jaw, keeping in mind to brush the incisors as well. Don't forget those bottom teeth!



You may have to slightly change positioning to brush the opposite side that you started on.

At the beginning, concentrate on brushing the large cheek teeth and the canine teeth, the teeth where plaque and tartar accumulate most quickly. Gradually work up to brushing all of the teeth (this will probably take several days or weeks).

Do not worry about brushing the tips or insides of the teeth unless your dog is very cooperative. Most of the periodontal lesions occur on the outer surfaces of the teeth and this is where you should direct your efforts. In addition, the dog's tongue tends to remove a lot of the plaque from the inner surfaces of the teeth, reducing the need for brushing these surfaces.