



# *Milton Animal Hospital*

## **Brushing Your Pet's Teeth Can be as Easy as A-B-C, 1-2-3**

When you schedule the kids for a back-to-school visit to the dentist, make an appointment for your other child as well—your pet. More and more Americans view their pets as children, and just like children, cats and dogs can have gum disease, cavities, and plaque build-up. Yet with regular exams and proper home care, Fido and Fluffy need not be afraid of a visit to the dentist's chair, says the American Animal Hospital Association.

"Too often we overlook the need for dental care for our pets," says Dr. Ed Eisner, an AAHA member who specializes in veterinary dentistry. "Untreated teeth can cause serious problems in the pet's overall health."

Periodontal disease is the number one dental problem in dogs and cats, and cats often develop defects below the gumline which may be hard to detect. As in humans, abscessed teeth or periodontal disease can affect other parts of the body. In dogs and cats, they can cause heart and kidney disease.

A regular veterinary dental checkup can help prevent serious problems and keep your pet healthy. Pet teeth cleaning includes use of a short-lasting anesthetic that allows for gumline probes, removal of tartar and tooth polishing. A good way to remember to schedule a dental exam is to combine it with your pet's annual booster vaccinations.

Equally important to annual dental exams is home dental care, such as brushing your pet's teeth at least three times per week. AAHA recommends a technique for both younger and older animals, although it's easier to start brushing when the pet is young.

1. To introduce your pet to brushing, wrap a gauze or washcloth around your finger and use it like a toothbrush on the pet's teeth. Wipe all the teeth, front and back, with strokes from the gumline to the tip of the tooth. Do this for one to two weeks until your pet is familiar with having its gums and teeth rubbed.
2. Gradually progress to a soft toothbrush and plain water. After a week of using a soft toothbrush, add a small amount of special dog or cat toothpaste. Never use human toothpaste as it may irritate the pet's stomach.
3. Begin by brushing the front teeth and then the upper and lower teeth in the back. The bristles should be held at a 45-degree angle to the tooth surface and be moved in an oval motion. Scrub in the crevice where the gums meet the teeth, as this is where odor and infection begin.

Home care can be improved by feeding your pet an unmoistened dry pet food and offering hard biscuits after each meal. Both dry food and hard biscuits produce abrasion to help keep plaque to a minimum on the crown of each tooth.

"We encourage people to regularly examine their pet's teeth for signs of periodontal disease, such as brownish colored teeth; swollen, red, or bleeding gums; persistent bad breath; loose teeth or loss of teeth; pus between the gums and teeth; broken teeth; and any unusual growth in the mouth," says Dr. Eisner. "Reluctance to eat, play with chew toys, or drink cold water are warning signs of periodontal or gum disease."