

Dental Care

As with humans, preventative dental care is the key to a healthy mouth and a quality life for pets.

A preventative dental program, including regular check-ups and home care, can prevent emergency dental problems for pets. Some veterinary statistics suggest that nearly 85% of all dogs and cats older than four years have some form of dental disease. Your cat depends on you to provide home dental care and regular professional examinations.

Common signs of dental disease are dark deposits on the teeth, bad breath, change in appetite, bloody gums, drainage inside the mouth or under the jaw, frequent sneezing, watery or bloody nasal discharge or excessive salivation. Also, if your pet has an abscessed tooth, you may notice swelling around the face.

Have your new pet's teeth checked at their first vaccination visit so any dental problems can be treated right away. Continue regular dental check-ups during your pet's life. If tartar or plaque is forming, the teeth should be cleaned. Some animals may need to have their teeth cleaned frequently. Similar to human dentistry, owners should brush their pet's teeth between check-ups.

Most small animal veterinarians will do routine cleaning and extraction, if necessary. Depending upon the severity of the problem, owners may have to take their pets to a specialist. Veterinarians can perform oral examinations when the animal is awake, but cleaning and/or extraction requires general anesthesia.

Home Dental Options for Your Pets

Tooth Brushing:

This is the very best home dental care you can provide for your pet. Tooth brushing removes plaque above and below the gum-line and slows the accumulation of tartar while helping prevent gum and bone infections. Use a toothbrush and toothpaste intended for pets. Pet tooth brushes are soft and shaped to fit in your pet's mouth. Pet toothpastes are made to be swallowed, unlike toothpaste made for people, they also do not contain fluoride. Pet toothpaste comes in flavors that are appealing. Take your time, be patient and always use positive reinforcement (praise and rewards) when brushing your pet's teeth. From your pet's perspective, tooth brushing means attention from you, tasty toothpaste on a soft brush and a reward afterward!

Pets should have their teeth brushed regularly. This is especially important for older animals, which are more likely to have plaque buildup.

To introduce your pet to brushing, rub its mouth and gums for a few minutes each day. After your pet becomes accustomed to this, begin to put a small amount of pet toothpaste on your finger when you rub the mouth and gums. Next, begin putting a small amount of toothpaste on a soft-bristle toothbrush specifically designed for pets and brush the teeth gently in a circular motion.

If your pet struggles when having its teeth brushed, try wrapping a large towel around them to restrain it. Be as gentle as possible and follow the brushing with praise and play, so your pet associates the experience with something positive.

Just like with nail clipping, if your pet starts to struggle, let them go and resume the next day. If using a tooth brush just does not work, try a rough washcloth with a little enzymatic toothpaste.

Breath Fresheners:

The most common cause of bad breath in pets is dental infection. If your pet's bad breath is due to infection, the breath will improve only when the infection is treated. However, sometimes temporary bad breath can be caused by digestive odors or dietary indiscretions (your pet ate something offensive). In these situations, a breath treat can control the problem. If your pet has persistent bad breath, consult your veterinarian promptly.

Chew Toys:

Chew toys provide some benefit by partially removing plaque and tartar above the gum-line. Always watch your pet when he or she has a chew toy, to avoid potential problems if the toy comes apart.

Dental Checkups:

Home dental care and regular professional examinations help protect your pet's health. Ask your veterinarian how often your pet needs a dental exam. Even if your pet appears normal, regular examinations could reveal severe dental problems that might have been well-hidden by your pet.

Dental Supplements:

Dental supplements can also be added to your pet's food and will help decrease plaque build-up. *Vermont's Own Keep-It Pearly* is a natural dental powder that helps to remove and prevent plaque and tartar buildup.

Plaque is composed of hard food debris and bacteria, combined with proteins and calcium salts from the saliva which hardens to form tartar or calculus. Cats tend to thrive when fed primarily a high moisture canned or raw diet. If you are not feeding a diet consisting of at least some dry food or raw bones, be extra careful to also clean your cat's teeth. Canned diets are very nutritious, but because the meat is ground, minimal chewing is required, which may lead to slightly increased tartar build up.

Natural Chews:

Raw bones are an excellent alternative to naturally keep your pet's teeth healthy. Raw chicken necks offer the benefits of soft chewable bone that will help clean teeth through the repetitive mechanical chew action and raw food has naturally occurring enzymes and good bacteria to promote a healthy dental environment.