

Dental Care: Brushing Your Dog's Teeth

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What you should know about Dental Care

Dental disease is the most common problem we see as veterinarians. Studies show that as early as age three, 80% of dogs exhibit signs of dental disease.

The problem starts when a film of bacteria called *plaque* starts to accumulate on teeth. Very soon the plaque becomes mineralized and turns into a hard adhesive material called *calculus*, or tartar. Plaque and tartar, especially when they accumulate below the gum line, begin to cause damage to the gums, eventually resulting in gum inflammation, erosion, and loosening of the teeth.

Martin R. Smith DVM



Since plaque begins to form on a puppy's teeth shortly after birth, it is essential that young dogs be started on a good oral hygiene program. We think a [toothbrush and pet toothpaste](#) should be a part of every puppy kit. There's nothing like the mechanical action of a brush combined with a pet toothpaste. We recommend daily brushing, as do board-certified veterinary dentists. Pick a time to do it each day – right before you go to bed, after your dog's morning meal, or whenever works best for you. Just stick with it.

If you haven't brushed your dog's teeth before, have them checked by your veterinarian. You may need to have them professionally cleaned first to remove the tartar. Brushing can't remove tartar or plaque below the gumline. Also, brushing teeth when there is accumulated tartar and inflamed gums can be painful for your dog, and may cause bleeding of the gums, which allows bacteria to enter the blood stream and damage the heart, kidneys, and other organs.

Brushing isn't hard if you have the right tools. For small dogs and cats, we recommend the [finger toothbrushes](#). For larger dogs, a pet [toothbrush](#) will help you reach those harder to get to back teeth. Make sure you use a [pet toothpaste](#) – human toothpastes are not designed to be swallowed and can upset your pet's stomach. We especially like our enzymatic [Tartar Control toothpaste](#).

You can complement your toothbrushing with [dental treats](#) and [toys](#) and use dental rinses like our [Dental Cleans liquid or spray](#) to decrease the bacteria level in the mouth.

Q & A

I've never brushed my dog's teeth before and would like to start. How do I begin?

Start slowly by first getting your dog used to his mouth being handled. See our online video "[How to clean your dog's teeth](#)" for step-by-step toothbrushing tips. If you take things slowly at the beginning and give lots of praise, you and your dog will start looking forward to your brushing sessions.

(watch video )

How often should I brush my pet's teeth?

Ask yourself this question: how long would you go without brushing your teeth? Bacteria and food build up on your pet's teeth just as they do on yours. We recommend daily brushing of your pet's teeth, so build-up doesn't have a chance to harden. If you're short on time, a quick wipe with a [Dental Clens® Pad](#) will help prevent plaque formation between brushings.

Dental Care Solutions

Dental care does not have to be difficult. We recommend three core steps that, when performed regularly, will do the most to ensure your dog's good oral health.

1. Brush your dog's teeth regularly with a toothpaste specially made for dogs
2. If you cannot brush, use an antibacterial dental solution or a dental cleaning pad daily
3. Offer your dog teeth-cleaning toys, rawhide, and treats