Dental Care Essentials for Cats

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Oral disease, the number one health problem diagnosed in pets, is easily preventable with proper care. Cleaning your cat's teeth regularly is a simple way to keep her healthy, and a great way for the two of you to bond.

Once you get the knack, cleaning her teeth will not only be a breeze, but an enjoyable experience for both of you. Simply take things slowly at the beginning and give lots of praise; you and your cat will soon begin to look forward to your cleaning sessions.

Here are a few simple suggestions:

Toothpastes and rinses

Make sure you use toothpaste specifically designed for cats. Toothpaste designed for people can upset your cat's stomach. Pet toothpastes may contain several different active ingredients; those that contain chlorhexidine or sodium hexametaphosphate are recommended.

Rinses that destroy the bacteria leading to plaque and gum disease are also available. Some can be placed directly in the mouth and used in conjunction with a fingertip brush or dental sponge for effective cleansing. Others are used in your pet's water bowl and will help dissolve plaque and tartar.

The use of breath drops or sprays can be used to combat the odors of tartar build up and gum disease until teeth can be professionally cleaned by a veterinarian. After a professional cleaning, you can develop a regular cleaning routine with your cat. Keep in mind these products should not be used in place of proper dental care.

Toothbrushes, sponges, and pads

Various brushes, sponges, and pads are available for cat-sized mouths. The choice of what to use depends on the health of your cat's gums, your ability to clean the teeth and her cooperation.

Dental cleaning pads are a good choice for animals with sensitive gums and for, owners with arthritis or other conditions that make holding a brush difficult.

How often?

Obviously, any cleaning is better than no cleaning at all. But keep in mind, the more often you clean your cat's teeth the healthier her teeth and gums will be. Daily cleaning is optimal since plaque starts to mineralize within 48 hours after it forms. The hardest thing about home dental care for cats is just getting started. Once you have done it for a while, it becomes part of your daily routine. While cleaning, be sure to check for any abnormalities or problems with your cat's teeth or gums.

Tip

Avoid feeding cats table scraps or treats that are sweet because they can increase the build up of plaque and tartar, and can lead to other health problems.

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