



Veterinary Dental Services, LLC

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Dental Care for Dogs and Puppies

Your dog is at risk for the same oral disease as you, which is preventable with proper home care and routine professional cleanings under anesthesia. There is no reason to believe that your dog does not feel the same pain of sore gums and a toothache that we feel. The main reason to care for your dog's teeth is to prevent tooth loss, pain and infection.

Plaque is a tan, thick substance consisting of saliva, bacteria and food particles. In fact plaque is 80% bacteria and forms within 6-8 hours after brushing. Plaque sticks to the teeth and collects below the gumline around the teeth. If left in place, plaque leads to gingivitis, and potentially gum recession and bone loss. Without bone and gum tissue to support the tooth, the tooth will eventually be lost. This same process can happen in our mouths, but we brush 2-3 times a day to remove plaque before it causes a problem.

Calculus, otherwise known as tartar, is typically brownish-yellow and is formed when plaque accumulates and mineralizes into multiple layers on the teeth. Plaque becomes tartar in 2-3 days. Once formed, calculus cannot be removed with tooth brushing alone and requires professional scaling by your veterinarian. Furthermore, plaque loves to stick to the rough surface of tartar. Heavy tartar build up creates new environments in which the most destructive bacteria thrive.

Signs of Gingivitis and Periodontal Disease

- Bad Breath
- Drooling
- Swollen or red gums
- Bleeding gums
- Receded gums
- Loose or missing teeth
- Difficulty chewing or eating
- Reluctance to play with toys
- Calculus (tartar) on teeth

How to Care for Your Dog's Teeth

We encourage brushing your pet's teeth every day. If you are unable to brush daily, once every other day is acceptable, but anything less than that is not effective. Plaque will harden into tartar within 48 hours of not brushing and tartar does not come off with a toothbrush.

Here at Veterinary Dental Services, we believe that most dogs can be trained to like tooth brushing. Below are steps to effectively train your dog to allow, and for some, even enjoy tooth brushing. Most dogs are able to move through these steps weekly. Some dogs may take more time and you may need to spend two weeks on each step. The goal is for long term success and acceptance, so don't rush.

Step One

Start by bringing your dog into an area of your house where you will be doing the daily tooth brushing. Tell your dog to sit (small dogs are easiest if sitting on a counter top). Start by just handling his/her face for 30-60 seconds, rubbing the muzzle, lifting the lip and looking at the teeth and rubbing the eyes. Immediately follow with praise and a reward. Rewards can be treats, food or a toy.

Step Two

Introduce the tooth brush and tooth paste. Begin by simply holding the toothbrush in your hand and continue to do everything in step one. This will allow your dog to see the toothbrush coming at his or her face and to understand it is not hurting him. You can also put a small amount of the toothpaste on the brush and allow him or her to lick it off. Most pets like the flavor of the toothpaste, but are unsure of the consistency. You can try to put a dab on a treat you know your dog likes, just to get them used to it. Again be sure to follow with a reward and praise.

Step Three

Start brushing lightly. Begin to slip the toothbrush in between your dog's cheek and teeth and move the brush in a back and forth, or a circular motion from the back to the front. Do not be concerned about whether or not you are actually brushing the teeth effectively, remember, you are still training. Do not spend a long time, especially if your dog is fighting you. Just brush for a few seconds and reward. If your dog is tolerating it well, move the toothbrush to the other side of the mouth and do the same motion. Do not spend more than 30-60 seconds brushing. That is all it takes.

Remember to never use human toothpaste, baking soda or hydrogen peroxide, as these are unsafe for animals to swallow. Always use toothpaste labeled for pets. We would be happy to make recommendations for you.

It is important to do this daily as it helps to build it into your pet's routine, and also yours. Brushing just once or twice a week does not remove plaque often enough to prevent gingivitis and periodontal disease. Once both you and your pet have become accustomed to the process it will only take one minute out of your day. Try to have fun!