



## Keeping TEETH Tip Top

Your guide to good home dental care

By Charlotte Reed

*Love at first brush. That's how Peggy Breckley of Camarillo, California, describes her dog Chip's reaction to his first encounter with home dental care. "He really liked the taste of the doggy toothpaste, so it was easy to brush his teeth," Peggy remembers.*

*Chip was just 6 months old when Peggy started him on a home dental program. She's kept it up faithfully ever since. "My veterinarian recommended that I begin brushing Chip's teeth early to prevent dental disease and more serious infections later on. I also know dogs with terrible bad breath and gum disease. I don't want Chip to have any of those problems, so I brush!"*

Protecting your pet from dental disease by effectively brushing his teeth takes only 1 or 2 minutes a day. This small commitment can make a

big difference to your pet's well-being, and your veterinarian can help you get started. According to Dr. Clarence G. Sitzman, president of

the American Veterinary Dental Society, all it takes is a toothbrush. "The best way to maintain your pet's dental care is to brush her teeth daily, just as you do your own," he says. "At a minimum, brush three times per week."

### GETTING STARTED

The two key components in the home dental care arsenal are your pet's toothbrush and toothpaste. Dr. Brook Niemiec of Southern California Veterinary Dental Specialties advises his clients to always use toothpastes and toothbrushes made especially for pets. "Toothbrushes designed specifically for pets are



## IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY ... OR TOO LATE!

Besides using the right accessories, it's important to start brushing your pet's teeth early. The sooner you start a home dental routine, the easier it will be for your pet to adjust to the process. And although it is best to begin brushing your pet's teeth when he is a puppy or kitten, it is never too late to start. Dental care is an important and simple way to prevent disease in your cat or dog. Besides, by brushing your pet's teeth daily, he will have a healthier and sweeter smile.

smaller and softer and have a somewhat different shape, making them a better fit for your dog or cat," he says. "If necessary, you can even use a brush designed for children." Dr. Niemiec particularly likes the small circular-ended toothbrush for cats.

For cats and smaller dogs, you can start out with a fingerbrush, which fits right over the tip of your index finger. This brush is similar to a thimble and is made of durable plastic with soft bristles that are gentle on your pet's gums. Because the end of a fingerbrush cannot extend under the gum line, it is best to use it only for introducing your pet to toothbrushing or for pets that will not accept any other type of brush. Owners with arthritis or other conditions that make holding a brush difficult can consider using dental cleaning pads, which are textured pads that help wipe away food and debris.

With regard to toothpastes, those made for people contain ingredients that are not appropriate for pets. (Remember, your pets do not know how to spit after brushing.) "Toothpastes made for people can make your pet sick if swallowed," Dr. Niemiec warns. He adds that many veterinary toothpastes add enzymatic cleaner and increase the palatability of the product. "Pet toothpastes are specially formulated not only to taste great but also to be safe for pets to swallow," he notes. Dr. Niemiec encourages pet owners to ask their veterinarian's advice on the best dental products for their pet.

### GOOD, CLEAN FUN

Brushing your pet's teeth can be fun for the both of you. Once you have the

correct equipment, pick a time of day that will be convenient to commence a regular brushing routine, such as after your pet's evening meal. Here are a few tips:

- Sit your pet in a comfortable position and carefully lift his lips to expose the teeth.
- Rub your finger over the pet's teeth and gums for about a minute to get him accustomed to the feeling. (You may need to repeat this step for a few days before proceeding to the next step.)
- Let your pet sniff the toothbrush, and put some toothpaste on your finger for your pet to taste.
- Put a small amount of toothpaste on the brush, gently lift his lip, and slowly brush one or two teeth in a circular pattern.
- As the sessions continue, slowly include more teeth.

At the end of the oral hygiene session, reward your pet with a walk or some playtime.

### JUST A FEW MINUTES A DAY

Try to schedule sessions at least two or three times a week; daily brushing is best, if possible. All you need is a little patience and the right accessories to get the job done smoothly. 🐾

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