

Baring Their Teeth

Maintaining a Cat or Dog's Dental Health Is Important, Even if They Resist at First

According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show signs of oral disease by the age of 3. Without regular brushing and veterinary dental cleanings, food and bacteria can harden on the tooth, forming plaque and, over time, tartar. If left unattended, this buildup can result in gingivitis (an inflammation of the gums). Periodontal disease can eventually lead to infection and tooth loss. In dogs and cats, severe infection can also affect other parts of the body such as the heart, liver and kidneys.

The best way to maintain your pet's dental care is to brush your pet's teeth daily, just as you do your own. All you need to get started is a toothbrush and some pet toothpaste. Use toothbrushes designed specifically for pets, because they are smaller, softer and have a somewhat different shape. If necessary, a brush designed for children also will work. Don't use human toothpaste; its ingredients will make your pet sick when they swallow it. Pet toothpastes contain a different type of cleaner and are designed to taste better with chicken and liver flavorings.



Talk to your pet in calm voice, always praising him for his participation. Continue to brush his teeth in a circular motion at a 45 degree angle from the gum line. Brush the outside of the larger teeth in the front of the mouth first, gradually increasing the amount of teeth brushed. Although most larger dogs and cats have little to no decay or tartar on the inside of their teeth due to the action of the tongue, small dogs need to have the inside of their teeth brushed.

At the end of the oral-hygiene session, reward your pet with a walk or some playtime. The more you brush your pet's teeth the better, but you can also contribute to your pet's dental hygiene regimen by serving him hard kibble and biscuits, which can help prevent gum disease, instead of table scraps and wet food. Also, some soft toys can provide



Morning Routine: Like people, cats have grooming habits, which should include daily brushing

Once you have the correct equipment, pick a convenient time of day to commence a regular brushing routine, such as after your pet's evening meal. Sit quietly and restrain your pet minimally. Most pets are initially uncertain about having someone or something entering their mouth. Get your pet used to your rubbing his lips. Next, rub your pet's teeth with your finger wrapped in gauze or a wet washcloth in a circular motion. When your pet accepts this, add flavored pet toothpaste to a brush and allow him to lick the paste from the brush. Once he is used to the toothbrush and the paste, get ready to start brushing.

similar benefits by rubbing the surface of the teeth, but do not have your pets play with toys that are abrasive and can wear down teeth. If your pet is an aggressive chewer, choose toys that are not likely to break a tooth.

Although it is best to begin brushing your pet's teeth when he or she 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 dog or cat, and will give your pet a healthier and sweeter smile. ■

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