

Healthy Teeth

Dental care in cats and dogs



Dental Health

Dental health is a very important part of your pet's overall health, and dental problems can cause other health problems. Many dogs and cats will have signs of dental disease as early as 3 years old. Your pet's teeth and gums should be examined by your vet at least once a year, or sooner if you notice signs of dental issues. In between exams, there are things you can do at home to help keep your pet's mouth healthy!

Signs of a Problem

How will you know if your pet is having dental issues? Symptoms can be subtle, so you may have to pay close attention to notice them. Cats can be especially stoic!

Bad Breath

Change in behavior, irritable or rubbing face

Bleeding or swelling around face, nose, or mouth

Change in appetite, drooling or dropping food

Discolored or missing teeth, tartar buildup

How to Brush

Acclimate your pet to brushing by starting with pet toothpaste on your finger. Choose a flavor your pet likes. Let your pet lick the toothpaste first. Gently rub toothpaste onto the outside surfaces of your pet's teeth. Don't try to rub the inside surfaces - your pet might accidentally bite down on your finger. Be patient and give praise! It takes time for pets to get used to brushing. As your pet becomes comfortable with your finger, you can graduate to a finger brush and eventually a toothbrush.

Why does a dental cleaning require anesthesia?

Anesthesia allows for a complete cleaning or extractions if necessary. A complete cleaning means buildup is removed from both the visible tooth surface and below the gumline. If x-rays are needed, your pet must be very still in order to get good images. Pets can't understand the benefits of dental procedures and can't be expected to keep still!

Tooth Care at Home

Regular brushing is the most effective thing you can do to keep your pet's teeth healthy between cleanings. Use a toothpaste designed for pets. Human toothpaste contains ingredients that are not meant to be swallowed. Studies show that brushing 3x per week is enough to maintain a healthy mouth. Regular professional cleaning is also necessary for some pets. Discuss with your vet whether your pet should have a cleaning. Many products marketed with claims that they improve dental health, but not all are effective. Ask your vet if water additives, rinses, dental chews or treats, or special food might be an option for your pet.