

Brushing Teeth & Home **Dental** Care

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Brushing your dog's teeth should not be a chore for you or your dog. Instead, it should be an enjoyable time for both of you. If you take things slowly at the beginning and give lots of praise, you and your dog will start looking forward to your brushing sessions. But first, we need to gather together what we will need.

Toothpastes and rinses

There are many pet toothpastes on the market today. Make sure you use a pet toothpaste. Toothpastes designed for people can upset your dog's stomach. Pet toothpastes may contain several different active ingredients. Various veterinary dentists have recommended those toothpastes, gels, and rinses that contain chlorhexidine, hexametaphosphate, or zinc gluconate. For dogs with periodontal disease, fluoride treatments or toothpastes may be prescribed by your veterinarian. (Please do not use any human fluoride containing toothpastes on your pet.) Flavored toothpastes can make toothbrushing more acceptable to pets.

Toothbrushes, sponges, and pads

The real benefit of toothbrushing comes from the mechanical action of the brush on the teeth. Various brushes, sponges and pads are available. The choice of what to use depends on the health of your dog's gums, the size of your dog's mouth, and your ability to clean the teeth.

Use toothbrushes designed specifically for pets - they are smaller, ultra-soft, and have a somewhat different shape. Finger toothbrushes that do not have a handle, but fit over your finger, may be easier for some people to use. Pet toothbrushes are available through our company, your veterinarian, or some pet stores. For some dogs, starting out with **dental** sponges or pads may be helpful since they are more pliable. **Dental** sponges have a small sponge at the end of a handle, and are disposable. They are softer than brushes. **Dental** pads can help remove debris from the teeth and gums but do not provide the mechanical action that brushes do.

Where to begin

Number one, this should be fun for you and your dog. Be upbeat and take things slowly. Do not overly restrain your dog. Keep sessions short and positive. Be sure to praise your dog throughout the process. Give yourself a pat on the back, too! You are doing a great thing for your dog!

First, have your dog get used to you putting things in her mouth. Dip your finger in beef bouillon. Call your dog with a voice that means "treat" and let your dog lick the liquid off your finger. Then rub your soaked finger gently over your dog's gums and teeth. After a few sessions, your dog should actually look forward to this and you can move on.

Now, place a gauze around your finger. (You can again dip it in the bouillon.) Gently rub the teeth in a circular motion with your gauzed finger. Repeat this for the number of sessions it takes your dog to feel comfortable with this procedure. Remember to praise her and keep an upbeat attitude.

After your dog is used to having the flavored gauze in her mouth, you are ready to start with a toothbrush, **dental** sponge, or pad. We need to get your dog used to the consistency of these items, especially the bristles on a brush. So, let your dog lick something tasty off of the brush or pad so she gets used to the texture.

Once your dog is used to the cleaning item you are going to use, we can add the toothpaste (or rinse). Pet toothpastes either have a poultry, malt, or other flavor so your dog will like the taste.

Get your dog used to the flavor and consistency of the toothpaste. Let your dog lick some off your finger and then apply some to your pet's gumline with your finger. Praise your pet.

Now your dog is used to the toothbrush and toothpaste and you are ready to start brushing. Talk to your dog in a happy voice during the process and praise your dog at the end. At first, you may just want to brush one or both upper canine teeth (the large ones in the front of the mouth). These are the easiest teeth for you to get at and will give you some easier practice. As before, when your dog accepts having several teeth brushed, slowly increase the number of teeth you are brushing. Again, by making it appear to be a game, you both will have fun doing it. How often?

Certainly, the more often you brush the better. Always aim for daily **dental** care for your dog, just as you aim for daily **dental** care for yourself. The hardest thing about home **dental** care for dogs is just getting started. Once you have done it for a while, it just becomes part of your daily routine. If you cannot brush daily, brushing every other day will remove the plaque before it has time to mineralize. This will still have a positive effect on your dog's oral health.

I have developed a habit of brushing my dog's teeth after I am done brushing mine. I talk to my dog, through the procedure, praise her when we are done, and then give her a treat to chew on. Now when she hears me brushing my teeth, she comes into the bathroom wagging, and waits for her turn.

Other dental care items

Water-piks: A water-pik-type **dental** system has been developed for dogs. It works on the same principle as similar devices for people. Chlorhexidine is added to the water to kill the bacteria in the mouth, and the water stream removes the plaque. This may be especially useful for some pets with gum disease, who bleed from the gums if a brush is used.

Food: Studies show that hard kibbles are slightly better at keeping plaque from accumulating on the teeth. There is a veterinary dentist-approved food on the market called t/d made by Hill's, the Science Diet people. Research studies have shown that pets eating this food have less plaque and calculus build-up. This food is available through your veterinarian.

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

Toys: Mechanical removal of plaque can be accomplished by using toys such as Plaque Attacker **dental** toys, rope toys, or rawhide chips. Do not use toys that are abrasive and can wear down the teeth. If your dog is a very aggressive chewer, choose toys that are not so hard that he could possibly break a tooth on them. You may need to look for toys he cannot get his mouth around. Rawhide or other chews that soften as the dog chews are another option. Always supervise your dog when he is chewing on a toy.