

### HOW TO BRUSH YOUR PETS TEETH

Can you imagine going a day without brushing your teeth? Of course not! Yet many people don't brush their pet's teeth, so most dogs and cats have evidence of dental disease by the time they are just 3 years old.

A good home dental care regimen can help your pet stay healthy and even save you money by prolonging the need for dental cleanings or tooth extractions..



Training when they're young and making sure you're doing it in a way that creates a positive association is the most beneficial for them. With dogs, we recommend approaching it like any other training... lots of positive reinforcement, going slowly and stopping before that puppy gets aggravated or irritated with the process.

At SunShine Animal Hospital, we suggest starting with special pet toothpaste flavored like beef or poultry. Then put a pea-size amount of toothpaste in your pet's mouth and immediately reward him with a treat, toy, or interaction.

The next day, increase the amount of time between giving the toothpaste and the reward. Gradually increase the time each day.

Next, put the toothpaste on a small finger brush or toothbrush and slowly introduce it to your pet's mouth. Don't forget the reward!

Eventually work up to brushing the teeth, particularly focusing on the outer surface that faces the lip and away from the gum line. Remember the reward afterwards.

Continue brushing every day for the best results.

With effort & patients, cats can be trained in a similar way, though large toothbrushes are too big for their mouths. Instead, use an infant finger brush or a gauze square to brush the teeth in a circular motion, just as you would brush your own teeth. If you have issues with your cat moving too much while brushing, you can wrap him in a towel and hold him close to you.

#### **Beware Of Non-Anesthetic Dentistry**

Some groomers, pet stores, and even non-accredited veterinary hospitals offer "non-anesthetic pet dentals," but buyers beware: This procedure is stressful for pets, does not treat any issues beneath the gum line, and can be potentially dangerous.

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Be very cautious of people who offer those anesthetic-free dental cleanings. Non-anesthetic dentistry is not a safe way to clean teeth. It can often lead to secondary issues when the dog is awake and moving, such as slicing gums and breaking teeth. It creates huge divots in the enamel, and doesn't protect the pet's airways, either.

AAHA issued a mandatory dental standard in 2013 that all dental procedures in AAHA-accredited practices must be performed under anesthesia with patients intubated, and that "cleaning a companion animal's teeth without general anesthesia is considered unacceptable and below the standard of care." The position was endorsed by the American Veterinary Dental College (AVDC).

If, despite your best efforts, tooth brushing is still impossible and has begun to affect your bond with your pet, there are many other products, like dental chews, can help. Just be sure to look for the "Seal of Acceptance" from the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) when shopping for them, she says.

Indications of dental disease include bad breath, discoloration of the teeth, and redness of the gums. At SunShine Animal Hospital we recommend yearly oral exam to detect these and other oral health problems before your pet begins to suffer from more severe conditions related to dental disease.

This includes the transfer of bacteria and infection into the bloodstream, which can affect your pet's overall well-being. When this happens, "the blood then goes into the major organs of the body and can cause major damage there.

Finally, abscessed teeth and other dental issues should be taken care of, or better yet, avoided because they are painful. Since cats tend to be pretty silent in their disease, we have seen standoffish animals that would hide from people become happy and outgoing after dental treatment. Dental disease develops so gradually the even the pet owner may not realize how severely affected their pet is, until they have a dental cleaning and the oral disease is treated. Often these pets are "made young again" once the pain is gone.