

# Brushing Your Dog's Teeth

- Periodontal disease can lead to tooth loss and affects most dogs by the time they are 3 years old.
- Depending on your dog's overall health, bacteria from periodontal disease can spread to affect other organs.
- Have your dog's teeth checked by your veterinarian before you start brushing them.
- Make toothbrushing enjoyable for your dog by rewarding him or her immediately after each session.
- Be very patient when teaching your dog to accept toothbrushing.
- If your dog won't tolerate toothbrushing, your veterinarian can recommend plaque-preventive products for your dog.

## Periodontal Disease—Why Brush?

Periodontal (gum) disease can lead to tooth loss and affects most dogs by the time they are 3 years old. Depending on your dog's overall health, bacteria from periodontal disease can spread to affect other organs. One of the best ways to help prevent periodontal disease is to brush your dog's teeth daily, or at least multiple times a week.

Dogs are never too young to start having their teeth brushed at home; in fact, the younger they are, the better.

Have your dog's teeth checked by your veterinarian before you start brushing them. Your veterinarian may recommend a dental cleaning to remove any existing plaque and tartar, which contribute to periodontal disease. If your dog has severe dental disease, extraction of the affected teeth may be recommended. Follow your veterinarian's recommendation on how long to wait after dental cleaning or extraction before brushing your dog's teeth.

## What You Need

- Baby toothbrush or pet toothbrush that is an appropriate size for your dog; if your dog won't tolerate a toothbrush, a small piece of washcloth can be used
- Pet toothpaste
- Treat or other reward your dog really likes

**Note:** Do not use toothpaste for people or baking soda to brush your dog's teeth. Human toothpaste is made with ingredients that can cause stomach upset if swallowed (e.g., detergents, fluoride). Dog toothpaste comes in different flavors (e.g., poultry, beef,



## Brushing Your Dog's Teeth *continued*



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### Signs of Dental Problems

- Bad breath
- Sensitivity around the mouth
- Loss of appetite and/or weight
- Yellow or brown deposits on the teeth
- Bleeding, inflamed, and withdrawn gums
- Loose or missing teeth
- Pawing at the mouth or face
- Difficulty chewing

vanilla mint). You may need to try a couple flavors to find the one your dog likes the best. The more your dog likes the toothpaste, the easier it will be to train him or her to accept brushing.

### Technique

- Toothbrushing should be a bonding experience that is constantly reinforced with praise and rewards. Be very patient—teaching your dog to accept toothbrushing may take weeks. Make toothbrushing enjoyable for your dog by rewarding him or her immediately after each session.
- You only need to brush the outside of your dog's teeth—the side facing the cheek. Only do as much at a time as your dog allows. You may not be able to do the whole mouth at first.
- If you are ever worried about being bitten, stop. Ask your veterinarian about how best to care for your dog's teeth.
- Start by letting your dog get used to the toothbrush and toothpaste. Put them out and let your dog sniff them. You can let your dog taste the toothpaste to see if he or she likes it.

- Also, get your dog used to you touching his or her mouth. Lift his or her lips, and slowly and gently rub your dog's teeth and gums with your finger
- When your dog is comfortable with you touching his or her mouth and is familiar with the toothbrush and toothpaste, gradually switch to putting the toothpaste on your finger, and then to putting the toothpaste on the toothbrush. At first, let your dog lick the paste off the brush to get used to having the brush in his or her mouth. If your dog won't tolerate a toothbrush, a small piece of washcloth can be used. Place a small amount of toothpaste on the washcloth, and rub it over the outside surfaces of your dog's teeth.
- Brush your dog's teeth along the gum line. Work quickly—you don't need to scrub. Work up to at least 30 seconds of brushing for each side of the mouth every other day.
- If you notice any problems as you brush, like red or bleeding gums or bad breath, call your veterinarian. The earlier problems are found, the easier they may be to treat.

### Other Ways to Control Plaque

Although there's no substitute for regular toothbrushing, some dogs just won't allow it. If you can't brush your dog's teeth, ask your veterinarian about plaque-preventive products. Feeding dry food may also help keep your dog's teeth and gums in good condition. The Seal of Acceptance from the Veterinary Oral Health Council appears on products that meet defined standards for plaque and tartar control in dogs and cats. You can find a list of these products at [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org). ■