

## Brushing Your Pet's Teeth

Equally important to annual dental exams at your veterinarian's practice is home dental care, including brushing your pet's teeth every day if possible. We recommend a technique for both younger and older animals, although it's easier to start brushing when your pet is young.

To introduce a fearful Fido or timid Tabby to the idea of dental care, start slowly and gradually.

" Dip a finger into beef bouillon (for dogs) or tuna water (for cats) and gently rub along your pet's gums and teeth.

The most important area to focus on is the gum line (the crevice where the gums meet the teeth), where bacteria and food mix to form plaque.

" Focusing on the gum line, start at the front of the mouth, then move to the back upper and lower teeth and gum areas. Once your pet is okay with a little bit of touching, gradually introduce gauze over your finger and rub the teeth and gums in a circular fashion.

" When your four-legged friend can handle the gauze, try brushing with a finger brush, then a toothbrush specially designed for pets.

The bristles should be held at a 45-degree angle to the tooth surface and be moved in an oval motion. Scrub in the gum line, as this is where odor and infection begin.

" Gradually add special dog/cat toothpaste (flavored with meat or fish), but never use people toothpaste or baking soda, as both will upset your pet's stomach.

" We recommend brushing inside and outside of your pet's teeth. If your pet is intolerable of this at least brush the outside of teeth.

Use the following process to clean the inside surfaces of your pet's teeth:

1. Place your hand over your pet's muzzle from the top.
2. Gently squeeze and push his lips on one side between the back teeth (to keep his mouth open).
3. Pull his head back gently so his mouth opens.
4. Brush his teeth.
5. Repeat on other side.

The entire process should only take a minute or two. If your pet continues to resist, try gently wrapping him in a large bath towel with only his head sticking out. Above all, avoid over-straining and keep sessions short and positive. With plenty of praise and reassurance, your dental sessions can bring the two of you closer—a closeness that won't be marred by the perils of dog breath.

\*Although not as effective as brushing an alternative is feeding Hill prescription diet T/D. T/D may be fed as a sole daily ration or as a treat. It needs to comprise at least 25 percent of your pet's diet. The kibble contains a fiber matrix that "scrubs" the teeth of plaque as your pet chews.

Note: Wetting down or mixing canned food with T/D will decrease its effectiveness.