

Your Dog's Pearly Whites

Brushing your dog's teeth on a daily basis can keep his teeth clean and white. However, there's an even more important reason to have a good brushing routine for Fido. Your dog can get gum disease and tooth decay just as humans can. Gingivitis and periodontal disease can occur because of the build up of bacteria that cause plaque and tartar to form on the teeth. Regular veterinary care and professional dental cleaning is important and can increase the life span of your pet. Just as in humans, dental disease can lead to other problems including infections in the blood stream and heart, lungs and kidneys. Regular brushing of your dog's teeth will help keep your dog's mouth healthy between veterinary checkups. Daily brushing is recommended.

Examine your dog's mouth when you brush his teeth, including the roof of the mouth, teeth and gums. If you notice redness, tartar buildup, bleeding, swelling or small growths, consult with your veterinarian. If your dog is drooling excessively or has bad breath, this can be a sign of poor dental condition.

Conditioning Your Dog to Like Tooth Brushing

Getting your dog to accept having his teeth brushed can start when he is a puppy if possible. Avoid making your puppy feel restrained. Hold the puppy or dog gently in your lap or sit on the floor with him. Gently lift his lips on each side and give him a treat. Dip your finger in some broth and run your finger along the gums. Give him a treat for being calm. If he doesn't want his mouth handled, you may have to start more slowly getting him used to touching him this way. Try just opening his mouth and placing a kibble on his tongue. Take your time on this initial step, using several sessions to get him used to you handling his mouth before proceeding to brushing his teeth.

When he readily lets you handle his mouth and touch his gums, wrap a wet piece of cotton gauze around one finger and smear some toothpaste specifically for dogs on the gauze, letting him sniff the gauze. Use only toothpaste made specifically for pets, not human toothpaste! Wipe the gauze gently across the dog's gums in a circular motion. Most dogs like the taste of the toothpaste and will not mind this if you have taken the time to accustom him to the mouth handling. Try to get all the way back around the molars on each side. Give your dog a treat for allowing this "brushing". Slowly, over a few sessions, get Fido used to a bit more pressure for this gauze brushing.

When Fido can calmly allow this gauze "brushing", put some of his toothpaste on a soft toothbrush that has been thoroughly moistened, and lightly brush his front teeth, giving him several small treats for staying calm. Try to brush near the gums, being careful not to put too much pressure on. Work him up to accepting brushing his entire set of teeth, getting all the way back to his molars.

In addition to regular brushing, your dog will benefit from chewing on raw marrow bones (remove most of the marrow), dry kibble or doggie biscuits and even specially treated dental chews. Your veterinarian can also provide with you with specially treated gels that coat the dog's teeth and inhibit bacterial growth and plaque buildup.

Always check with your veterinarian to get the latest information on proper dental care or if your dog is having any signs of dental problems.