

Brushing Your Pet's Teeth

Only 1% of dogs and fewer cats in the US have their teeth brushed daily.* For many pet owners, brushing their pets' teeth is a daunting task. But if it can be done, toothbrushing is the most effective way to prevent plaque and tartar buildup.

The Toothpaste

Choose a toothpaste specifically formulated for pets in a flavor that your pet already likes, such as the same flavor as their food. Be sure not to use human toothpaste. The fluoride in human toothpaste is toxic to pets. Introduce your pet to the toothpaste by applying it to your finger and allowing your pet to lick it off. Do this a few times before you attempt to brush so your pet will view the toothpaste as a treat.

The Toothbrush

Use a toothbrush that fits comfortably within your pet's mouth. Pet toothbrushes come in two main styles:

- A traditional brush with different-sized bristles on both ends
- A finger brush, with small bristles on the tip

Veterinarians may recommend using the traditional brush style to protect your hands in case your pet becomes excited. However, if your pet is already accustomed to having their mouth handled, you may be comfortable with the finger cap.

The Right Time

Choose a time of day when your pet is calm or relaxed, like right after a long walk or before bedtime. That way, they'll be more receptive to you touching them and being in their space. Steer clear of playtime or before or after feeding time, because your pet may be excited or protective.

Examining the Mouth

Only the trained eye of a veterinarian will catch all possible oral health issues, but before brushing, check your pet's mouth for bleeding, missing or chipped teeth or irritated gums. You don't want to cause more discomfort.

The Proper Grip

After placing the toothpaste on the bristles of the toothbrush, hold the brush at a 45-degree angle and start brushing on the outside of the teeth at the back of the mouth. Move forward in the mouth using a circular motion after you've brushed both the bottom and top teeth.

Brushing Thoroughly

Take care to brush every tooth. But don't worry if you cannot reach the inside of the teeth. The toothpaste and tongue licking will help to clean those tooth surfaces.

The Reward

Reward your pet with loving praise, a treat or a special toy when you are finished brushing to reinforce good behavior.

You may not feel able to brush your pet's teeth as well as your own, but making brushing part of your daily routine will help keep plaque and tartar buildup in check. If your pet is not receptive to daily toothbrushing, try a daily dental treat. Always look for treats that carry the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) Seal of Approval, such as GREENIES® Canine Dental Chews, for the most effective preventive oral care.

* American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, Inc. *National Pet Owners Survey*, 2009-2010