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### Home Dental Care

Brushing your puppy or kitten's teeth is the main component of home dental care in order to remove plaque before it becomes tartar. Plaque is slime comprised of bacteria, saliva and food particles that adhere to the teeth and fill the pockets between the tooth and gum. If left undisturbed, plaque rapidly collects minerals from the saliva to form rock-like brown deposits known as tartar or calculus. If left in place, tartar buildup will cause bad breath, gum disease, periodontal disease and tooth loss. By brushing daily, you remove plaque thus slowing down the buildup of tartar.

Professional dental procedures on your pet require general anesthesia to thoroughly examine, x-ray, clean and polish your pet's teeth safely. These procedures may need to be performed several times during your pet's lifespan. With today's technology and advanced medicine, the risks associated with anesthesia are considerably less than the risk of dental neglect, resulting in oral and systemic disease.

Each animal's dental needs are different based on breed and genetic disposition. Some puppies will have retained baby teeth that need to be removed within the first year (typically done at the time of spay/neuter). A dental care program will be recommended to fit your pet's specific needs. **They keys to starting home dental care are to be patient, be consistent and make it positive.**

Trying to progress too rapidly could make your pet mouth-shy, making it very difficult to proceed. If handled properly, many animals come to truly enjoy their home care and the extra time that you spend each day will increase the bond between you, as well as keep your pet's mouth healthy.

### GUIDELINES

1. Start **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**. Eight to sixteen weeks of age is ideal. Pets don't need much maintenance at this age, but brushing once or twice weekly will familiarize them with the routine when the permanent teeth erupt.
2. Work gently with your pet's mouth. Make it fun for both of you! Use praise and love to gain their confidence and with a little patience, your pet will soon accept your attention. Try to plan short practice sessions at the same time each day so it becomes a routine. Late in the evening usually works well, as everyone is in a quiet mood. Start by handling the muzzle and tickling the lips and soon you will be able to rub the teeth and gums. Don't forget to give lots of love and praise.
3. Next, use a soft washcloth wrapped around the end of your finger to gently massage their gums and teeth.
4. Finally, slip on the finger toothbrush and add a little paste. Hold the brush on a 45 degree angle to the tooth and brush back and forth. Brushing the tongue side is less critical because the tongue typically cleans that side of the teeth. Make it a game.
5. Brushing daily with a toothpaste made for dogs and cats is ideal. Human toothpaste should be avoided. Fluoride can be toxic. Baking soda, with its high sodium content, can be dangerous to older pets. Hydrogen peroxide can be too harsh for the gums and will cause vomiting if swallowed.

6. Also use abrasive foods and treats such as dry kibble, Hills t/d diet, and CET enzymatic dental chews to help minimize build-up of tartar. Avoid natural bones, dried cow hooves and hard nylon toys as these are hard enough to fracture teeth.



By following a consistent program of home dental care, you will greatly improve your pet's oral health. This will mean fewer professional cleanings, less tooth loss and a happier, healthier pet. However, please understand that there is no substitute for professional veterinary care. We must work as a team to ensure a long and happy life for your pet. ☺