



Dental Care at Home

Dental care at home may include teeth brushing, tooth wipes, dental chews, proper chew toys, and/or a prescription diet. Home care can help reduce dental disease with the goal of decreasing the number of times a pet may need to undergo a veterinary cleaning under anesthesia. This not only keeps your pet healthier but also saves money.

♥ If dental disease is already present, a dental cleaning under anesthesia may be required to treat the dental disease. Home care will then be more effective. ♥

Teeth Brushing

Most pets will tolerate teeth brushing with a little encouragement. Positive reinforcement training is typically the most effective.

Here's how to start:

- Put a pea-size amount of pet toothpaste (do not use human products) in your pet's mouth and immediately reward him with a treat, toy, or interaction.
- The next day, increase the amount of time between giving the toothpaste and the reward. Gradually increase the time each day.
- Next, put the toothpaste on a small finger brush or toothbrush and slowly introduce to your pet's mouth. Reward immediately.
- Eventually work up to brushing the teeth, particularly focusing on the outer surface that faces the lip and away from the gum line. Brush their teeth similar to how you would brush yours -small circles on each tooth. It is not necessary to brush the inside or tongue surface of the teeth. Reward after each brushing.
- Continue brushing every day for the best results.

Signs of Dental Disease

Bad breath. Drooling. Dropping food or decreased appetite, eating only softened food. Swelling and/or redness of the gums. Tartar seen on the teeth. Broken, loose, or missing teeth.

It is not necessary to use toothpaste but if you do make sure it is a veterinary or pet specific toothpaste. Human products are toxic to cats and dogs. Use a soft bristle toothbrush that is the right size for your pet. Human tooth brushes work and come in several sizes -toddler brushes may be necessary for smaller pets. Human infant or pet finger brushes work well for tiny dogs and cats. Rinse the toothbrush well with hot water before, during, and after brushings.

Dental Chews



There are many dental chew/treat products on the market both over the counter and prescription. Find one that your pet likes and that is the right size for their mouth. Be sure the package has the "Seal of Acceptance" from the Veterinary Oral Health Council. Is necessary to give one chew each day to be effective. Dental chews/treats do have calories. Be aware of your pet's body condition. It may be necessary to decrease how much regular food they are getting when adding an additional source of calories to their diet.

Prescription Food

Dr. Parish keeps Hill's Science Diet t/d prescription food in clinic. This food has a special fiber matrix and larger kibble size that breaks off tartar and prevents plaque formation. This is a great choice for pets that don't like to chew or will not tolerate brushing. There is now an over the counter/non-prescription adult maintenance food for both dogs and cats that works quite well too. We also keep this food in clinic. Ask Dr. Parish if this food is right for your pet.

Chew Toys

Chews toys can be helpful for dental health in combination with brushing and dental chews or if your pet will not tolerate other dental care. It is important to choose a toy that is not so soft it can be broken up and swallowed but not so hard it will injure teeth. Firm rubber type products or rope toys are typically the best. Tennis balls and similar toys have a very abrasive coating and over time will wear down the enamel which may expose the pulp cavity of the tooth leading to pain and possibly infection. Racquet balls or similar toys work well but may be too small or too soft for some pets. If you have any questions about your pet's chew toys you can always bring them in to show your veterinarian.

Beware of Non-Anesthetic Dentistry

Some groomers, pet stores, and even non-accredited veterinary hospitals offer non-anesthetic pet dentals. This procedure is stressful for pets, does not treat any issues beneath the gum line, and can be potentially dangerous. It can often lead to secondary issues when the dog is awake and moving such as slicing gums and breaking teeth. It also creates divots in the enamel and doesn't protect the pet's airways.

AAHA issued a mandatory dental standard in 2013 that all dental procedures in AAHA-accredited practices must be performed under anesthesia with patients intubated, and that "cleaning a companion animal's teeth without general anesthesia is considered unacceptable and below the standard of care." The position was endorsed by the American Veterinary Dental College (AVDC).

More Information

- ♥ Veterinary Oral Health Council → www.vohc.org
- ♥ American Veterinary Dental College → www.avdc.org/ownersinfo.html
- ♥ American Veterinary Medical Association → www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Pet-Dental-Care.aspx