

PREVENTING DENTAL DISEASE IN YOUR PET



Important Points on Pet Dental Care

- Dental disease can lead to tooth loss and, rarely, systemic disease.
- Brushing is the best means to prevent dental disease, but it is essential to condition your pet to accept brushing.
- Starting with your finger, you can slowly work your way up to using a toothbrush. Treats should be used to try to make the experience as positive as possible.
- Treats and food designed to reduce tartar buildup can be helpful but should not be relied on exclusively to prevent dental disease.

One of the most important ways to prevent serious complications related to dental disease is by preventing the dental disease from occurring. This is done by brushing the teeth on a regular basis at home. Tartar and calculus will inevitably progress to gingivitis (inflammation of the gums), which can lead to root destruction and even spread of bacteria from the gingiva to other organs in the body via the blood.

Effective brushing of the teeth only takes 20-30 seconds each time. The most important thing is to condition your pet to allow you to do it.

The first step is to work with your pet at roughly the same time each day or evening, if possible. If you have a lap dog or cat, you can get them used to having their teeth brushed when sitting and petting them in the evenings.

Start by gently inserting your

finger between teeth and cheeks on each side of his mouth never between upper and lower teeth (you may wish to use a rubber glove if you don't like the feel of your pet's saliva on your hands!). Remember that this is a new



experience and your pet may find it strange and uncomfortable at first. If your pet becomes fractious while trying to brush, stop immediately; remember, we want this to be a positive experience. Treats can help!

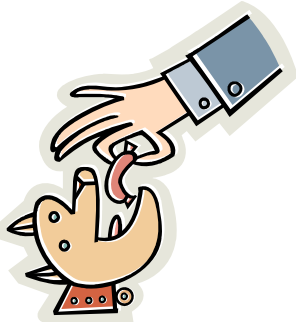
Throughout the training session, talk quietly and praise your pet over and over. After each training session give your pet a treat. This allows him/her to associate the positive experience of receiving a treat with the act of having the teeth brushed.

After (s)he has gotten accustomed to finger brushing, try putting a piece of gauze or cloth on your finger. Alternatively you can try a finger brush that is sold in most pet stores; these look like a thimble. It is not necessary to brush the inside of the teeth. Always remember to give a treat when you finish.

Eventually, you can move up to a small toothbrush. Brushes are available from pet supply stores (C.E.T.® Chews and Brushes), though a soft children's brush is acceptable as well (Oral B® 20). Special pet toothpaste is available but not necessary.

For long-term maintenance we recommend brushing once or twice a week. While this will not stop tartar buildup, it may slow it sufficiently to prevent the need for an anesthesia-assisted dental cleanings.

CAN TREATS AND FOOD HELP?



Several companies now sell "dental" diets and treats that are designed to slow tartar buildup. These foods are treated with coatings that scrub your pets' teeth as they chew. Two Harbors Veterinary Clinic stocks C.E.T.® Chews and Treats

for both dogs and cats, and we do feel these can help.

Iams Eukanuba® foods have all been treated with a coating which has been clinically shown to reduce tartar buildup. Hill's® also makes a dental diet and

Friskies® has a special dental diet for cats.

All of these foods can help, but is not a substitute for good dental care. Frequent brushing will always be more beneficial.