

Pet Dental Care

Many people don't realise that dental disease is very common in dogs, particularly gum disease. Breed, age and individual tendencies are factors, which affect the speed at which dental disease can develop. Dental care should therefore be part of your daily routine and will help to ensure that your dog lives a happy and healthy life. Ignoring the need for dental care could inevitably result in your dog's health suffering and ultimately reduce their life. Here are some facts and points you should follow to avoid your dog developing dental problems.

Tooth brushing, when done regularly, is the most effective way of removing plaque from your dog's teeth and keeping the gums healthy. It will also prevent bad breath.

Daily brushing should start straight away to prevent gum disease and tartar developing. With patience and time, your dog or puppy will soon learn to accept this as part of their daily routine.

A good quality human toothbrush is the best type of brush for your dog. An adult toothbrush can be used for large and medium breeds, while a child's toothbrush can be used for small and small to medium breeds. Puppy toothbrushes can be purchased which are suitable for miniature or toy breeds. Finger brushes and soft brushes can be used initially to familiarise your dog with the sensation of brushing.

It is important to use pet toothpaste. These are flavoured so that dogs enjoy the taste and will co-operate with brushing; malt flavour seems to be the favourite. Your dog will swallow all the toothpaste, so it should not contain any ingredient which may cause him harm.

Pet dental products are readily available from us or in local pet shops.

Most dogs enjoy chewing. Select a safe rubber chew toy, such as a Kong which may also help to keep the teeth cleaner. Remember dogs will chew with enough force to break their own teeth. Do not let your pet chew bones, stones or antlers as this can break teeth or lead to serious health problems. Always supervise dogs while chewing.

A dog suffering with toothache will rarely show any signs of discomfort or changes in eating behaviour. You should, therefore, regularly check their mouth for any problems. Check for: bad breath; red, swollen, or bleeding gums; chipped or broken teeth. Also check that the gum line fits properly around all of the teeth and that there are no swollen or ulcerated areas in the mouth. Your dog's teeth should be checked annually by a vet as part of their annual check up.

Hereditary problems such as remaining milk teeth, malocclusion (when the upper and lower teeth do not meet properly), missing teeth, crowding and overgrown gums can all make the mouth more prone to gum problems.

Puppies should have all their adult teeth by the age of seven months. All of the milk teeth should be lost by this time.

How to Clean Your Dog's Teeth

- Apply the toothpaste to the brush and then push it down into the bristles.
- Choose a time when your dog is settled. Sit them down quietly, either on the floor or for a small dog, on your lap.
- Place your left hand across the bridge of the nose (muzzle), with a finger or thumb under the chin to keep the mouth closed, gently lift the top lip and insert the toothbrush inside the cheek. The most important place to brush is at the gum line.
- The goal is to brush the outside surfaces of all the teeth, in a systematic way. Initially, your dog may not co-operate for long enough; if so, start brushing at a different position in their mouth each time.
- Start by cleaning the back teeth, particularly the upper ones and then the canine teeth. Once the dog is happy to accept this, progress to the front teeth.
- Brushing the inner surfaces of the teeth can prove to be difficult. If you are unable to do this, don't despair. Providing the rest of the teeth are reasonably clean and healthy, the tongue will do quite a good job of this.
- Move the brush in gentle circular motions. DO NOT scrub the teeth.
- Brushing should be carried out daily.
- If your pet has very inflamed gums (gingivitis), a dental gel or solution containing chlorhexidine to improve the gums. Chlorhexidine works best when combined with daily brushing to remove debris.
- Remember there is no point wrestling with your dog. Try to make it an enjoyable experience. If your dog behaves well, reward them with a small treat, there are plenty of good treats on the market that help with the control of tartar.