

DOGGIE DENTAL CARE

If brushing your dog's teeth seems a nuisance to you, consider these facts: your dog's poor dental health can lead to bad breath, bloody gums, periodontal disease and tooth decay. Severe problems can actually introduce bacteria into your dog's bloodstream causing damage to the liver and kidneys. Of course, you could always leave your dog's dental health up to your veterinarian. This choice has two disadvantages, however; dental cleaning is costly (upwards of \$100) and having your dog put under anesthesia always carries a risk.

Choosing to care for your dog's teeth may not be as difficult as you think, thanks to special chicken and beef flavored toothpastes (human toothpaste contains ingredients that are not meant to be swallowed). Begin by getting your dog used to the feel of something in his mouth by rubbing your index finger over his teeth and gums. Then advance to using one of your old toothbrushes or a finger brush from the pet store. When your dog is calmly lying with you, run the brush along the outside of his teeth and praise him for his patience. When he is comfortable with that, begin brushing the insides of your dog's teeth and the harder to reach areas. Using a doggie toothpaste can help with the process since most dogs love the meaty flavors. Make your first sessions short but sweet. If tooth brushing is introduced to your dog slowly and with a positive attitude, he will actually come to look forward to your sessions. Plan to brush your dog's teeth at least once a week.

In between your weekly brushing, give your dog a hard chew toy or a rawhide to chew on. The chewing action helps to clear away food debris and can scrape plaque from the teeth. Hard foods can be helpful for healthy teeth also. Crunching hard food gives the gums a workout and improves blood circulation.

Small dogs can be more difficult to introduce to brushing. But experts say smaller dogs are more prone to tooth and gum disease, so be persistent. Short-nosed breeds still have all 42 teeth packed into a much smaller package. This allows food to get lodged in places the dog's tongue cannot get to. Be especially attentive if you have one of these breeds. If your little dog just refuses to have his teeth brushed, wrap him up in a towel like a little burrito, but be gentle.

Taking a little bit of time out of your busy week to brush your dog's teeth can save you a chunk of cash and save your dog a myriad of health problems.

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