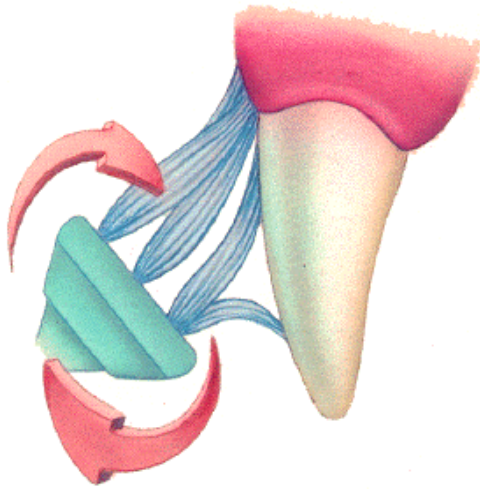


# Cleaning your pet's teeth



**Proper position of toothbrush against tooth**

What would happen if you stopped brushing your own teeth? Even if you only ate hard food as most dogs do, there still would be problems. You should be brushing your dog's teeth at least twice weekly, daily if you can manage it. It's not as difficult as you might imagine.

What are the benefits? Brushing removes the daily accumulation of plaque from the teeth. Even though dogs do not commonly get cavities, they do suffer from periodontal disease. If untreated the gum disease can lead to pain and loss of teeth.

## **How to brush teeth?**

**Step one** is to pick an appropriate pet toothbrush. Save yourself time by not buying a child's toothbrush which is usually too hard for dogs. The ideal dog toothbrush will have a long handle, an angled head to better fit the mouth and extra soft bristles. Another option is the finger toothbrush that fits over the tip of your finger.

**Step two** is to select appropriate toothpaste. The best pet toothpastes contain enzymes that help control plaque. Try to avoid toothpastes with baking soda, detergents, or salt sometimes found in human pastes. Fluoride may be incorporated to help control bacteria. Rather than placing the paste on top of the brush try to place it between the bristles. This allows the paste to spend the most time next to the teeth.

**Step three** is to get the brush with paste into your dog's mouth and all the teeth brushed. Most pets accept brushing if they are approached in a gentle manner. If you can start when they are young, it's quite easy, but even older pets will accept the process. Start

slowly, you can use a washcloth or piece of gauze to wipe the teeth, front and back in the same manner you will eventually be using the toothbrush. Do this twice daily for about two weeks and your dog or cat should be familiar with the approach. Then take the pet toothbrush, soak it in warm water and start brushing daily for several days. When your pet accepts this brushing, add the toothpaste.

The toothbrush bristles should be placed at the gum margin where the teeth and gums meet at a 45 degree angle. The movement should be in an oval pattern. Be sure to gently force the bristle ends into the area around the base of the tooth as well as into the space between the teeth. Ten short back-and-forth motions should be completed, and then the brush should be moved to a new location. Cover three to four teeth at a time. Most attention should concentrate on the outside of the upper teeth.

In summary, small animal home care should include daily (or at least every other day) brushing, using an enzymatic pet toothpaste. Taking an active role in the care of your dog's dental care will help reduce dental disease, bad breath and potential life threatening heart and kidney disease. Everyone wins.