

Dental Health and Your Pet

By Shane E. Somerville, All The Best Pet Care

Dental disease is the number one health problem faced by dogs and cats over the age of three. Studies show that 80% of dogs over three exhibit signs of dental disease, and an equal percentage of cats will need dental care in their lifetime. Unchecked dental disease can lead to difficulty eating as well as a loss of teeth and bone matter. Additionally, bacteria can travel through the gums into the bloodstream leading to infections in the heart, kidneys, and liver, which can cause potentially life-threatening illnesses. Common signs of dental issues to watch for can include yellow or brown tartar buildup, red inflamed gums, bad breath, and loose or broken teeth.

What can you do to keep your pet's teeth healthy for a lifetime? First, be sure to have regular dental checkups with your pet's veterinarian. It may be necessary to have a surgical teeth cleaning to eradicate existing buildup. Second, be sure to do regular brushings at home. Finger brushes or a finger wrapped in gauze can be used to gently apply toothpaste onto the teeth and gums and scrub off buildup. Always use a paste made especially for pets such as Vet's Best or Petrodex, as human toothpaste can cause your pet to become ill. Third, offer your pet a variety of healthful chews and supplements that keep teeth clean and strong.

What About Kibble?

The popular myth that dry food helps to clean your pet's teeth is actually untrue. Dog and cat teeth are designed to rip and tear at fresh meat and bones, not crunch kibbles. Carbohydrate based matter, such as kibble, requires animals to adopt an unnatural chewing style which can often lead to particles becoming lodged in between the teeth. Once there, the carbs break down into sugars that can contribute to further tooth decay. The overall effect is like trying to brush your own teeth with crackers or pretzels! Cats especially have a difficult time chewing dry food, and often just swallow it whole. When they do actually bite into a kibble, it shatters on impact and the only part of the tooth that comes in contact with it is the tip - the rest of the tooth's surface never touches it. While canned food does not offer any abrasive properties, the high moisture content helps to rinse the teeth and keep them free of food particles. The low carbohydrate content of high-quality canned food also means a lowered amount of simple sugars introduced into the body. The top choice for dental health, however, is a diet based on raw meat and bones.

Raw Bones- Brushing Nature's Way

The single best dental aid you can give your pet is a raw meaty bone, such as our ROAR marrow and knuckle bones. Even cats can get in on the act with raw chicken wings and necks. As animals crunch down on bones, their teeth grind against them, polishing the enamel and breaking down tartar and plaque. The naturally occurring enzymes in raw bones also help to eliminate food buildup, and create an acidic environment that is naturally repellent to gingival bacteria. For more information on the other health benefits of feeding raw bones, please see our handout "Raw Meaty Bones for Dogs (And Even Cats.)" Also, many pre-made frozen raw diets such as Nature's Variety, Farmore and Natural Pet Pantry include ground bones in their formulas, making it easy to make sure your pet is getting plenty of bones in their diet.

Supplements and Chews- Tasty Treats for Teeth

One of our favorite products for both cats and dogs is Wysong's DentaTreat, a cheese enzyme powder that is a tasty addition to any meal. Sprinkling a small amount on top of your pet's meal can help prevent tooth decay and gingivitis, and is an easy way to give a dental product to picky animals, especially cats. It can also be mixed with water to form an excellent toothpaste for brushing. We also love Plaque Off, an algae powder that prevents plaque from accumulating on the teeth, and softens existing deposits. This tasty product requires only a small amount each day mixed with food to show amazing results in just weeks.

Merrick's Flossies are a tasty treat that dogs love! Each Flossie is a spiral wound beef tendon that is not only nutritious and delicious, but its unique curved shape helps it remove plaque buildup from the back surfaces and spaces between the teeth.

Zuke's Z-Ridge Bones offer a highly digestible formula with a great taste that dogs love. The abrasive texture helps to scrape plaque and tartar from the teeth. Frozen raw carrots can also offer help in scrubbing as well as important vitamins and minerals.

Animal's Apawthecary Fidodent breath drops combine natural herbs that have antiseptic, antimicrobial and digestive properties that can both sweeten breath and eliminate oral bacteria.

By giving your pet a variety of healthful foods, chews and supplements, you can help ensure that his teeth stay pearly white and healthy for many years to come!

ALL THE BEST PET CARE

3037 78th Ave SE, Mercer Island (206) 232-4377 • 8050 Lake City Way NE (206) 524-0199 • 2713 E. Madison (206) 329-8565
2127 Queen Anne Av N (206) 283-3959 • 13510 Aurora Av N (206) 267-5090 • 2820 Alki Av SW (206) 938-7501
17875 Redmond Way, Redmond (425) 881-2232 • 1590 NW Gilman Blvd, Issaquah (425) 369-8383

www.allthebestpetcare.com