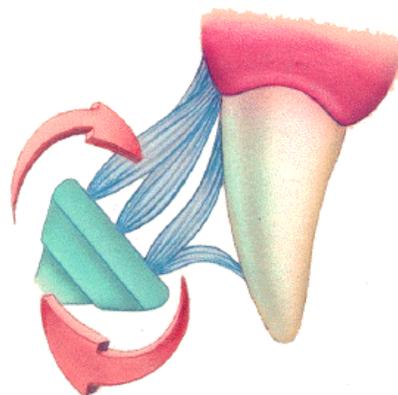


## A Guide to Canine Tooth Brushing

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 twice 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 tooth loss.

How do you brush your dog's 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. For dogs less than 30 pounds, the finger toothbrush that fits over the tip of your finger works well.



*Proper position of toothbrush against tooth.*

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

*Step three is to get the brush with paste into your dog's mouth to get all the teeth brushed.*



Most dogs 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 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 dog accepts this brushing, add the pet toothpaste.

Most attention should be given to the outside of the upper teeth. 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 place 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, then the brush moved to a new location. Cover three to four teeth at a time.

In summary, dog home dental care should include daily 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. Every one wins.

*Adapted from "The Dental Care Series" by Dr. Jan Bellows. Dr. Jan Bellows is a board-certified veterinary dentist.*