

# Dental Home Care

The Dentistry and Oral Surgery specialists at AERC recommend an individualized home care plan for each patient. Brushing, oral rinses, dental diets, as well as dental toys and treats are a few of the options to maintain good oral health for your pet.

## Dental Home Care Instructions

What would happen if you stopped brushing your own teeth? Even if you ate only hard food, as some dogs and cats do, there still would be problems. **Your pet's teeth must be brushed regularly.** Brushing removes the accumulation of plaque from the teeth, a precursor to gingivitis (reversible with good preventive care) and subsequent periodontitis (irreversible). If left untreated, periodontal disease will lead to inflammation, pain, infection, and eventually loss of teeth. Prevention of periodontal disease begins at home by establishing a routine home care program. Compliance will be different for every pet and their owners; therefore, each program should be individualized to their own home environment. The teeth should be brushed every day.

## How to Brush the Teeth

- Pick an appropriate toothbrush.
- Use dog toothbrushes made with long handles and soft bristles and cat toothbrushes made with small handles and fine bristles.
- Select the appropriate tooth paste.
- Avoid human toothpastes as they contain detergents and are not made to swallow.
- There are many pet toothpastes, oral gels and solutions available that should be used, depending on the type and degree of oral disease.
- Get the toothbrush and toothpaste into the mouth.
- Most pets accept brushing if they are approached in a gentle manner.
- Start slowly and follow the recommendations below.
- Begin brushing.

### Recommendations on Brushing

- Make tooth brushing a pleasant experience.
- Choose an area of the house that is comfortable for you and your pet.
- Start by lifting the lip and gently rubbing the teeth with your fingers.
- Once your pet is used to this, then begin by placing the toothbrush, with the mouth closed, in between the lips and the outside surfaces of the teeth.
- Sometimes placing a small amount of something appetizing to your pet (such as beef broth or tuna) on the tip of a toothbrush will be enough to get your pet used to the idea of brushing.
- Once he or she is used to tooth brushing, switch over to a pet toothpaste.
- A circular motion on the surfaces of the teeth is best; however, it is important to remember that any mechanical brushing is better than none, and each pet will be different.
- The toothbrush is placed at a 45-degree angle to the gum line so the bristles can penetrate into the gingival sulcus.
- Most attention should be given to the outside surfaces of the teeth.
- Tooth brushing is a process that is best started at an early age. Accept the fact that home dental care is a process of building confidence and trust with you and your pet.
- Do not force your pet to accept brushing.
- Wait at least 1-2 weeks after professional dental treatment to begin brushing since any pain post treatment will discourage your pet from accepting home care in the future.
- Gentle encouragement works best.
- Be sure to reward the process with lots of praise and treats!
- If your pet already has tartar accumulation or other signs of periodontal disease, an initial professional teeth cleaning and polishing is necessary before beginning a dental home care program.

#### **The Veterinary Oral Health Council**

[www.VOHC.org](http://www.VOHC.org)

#### **Home Care for Cats**

<http://avdc.org/careforcats.html>

#### **Home Care for Dogs**

<http://avdc.org/carefordogs.html>

#### **Instructional Video on How to Brush Your Cat's Teeth**

<https://www.veritasdvm.com/veritas/courses/brushing-your-cats-teeth/index.htm>