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D E N T A L H O M E C A R E

With your own teeth, what your dentist and hygienist do is only a small, though essential, part of your oral hygiene program. **You** are responsible for the daily brushing, rinsing and flossing that are required to slow the constant progression of periodontal disease. The same is true for your pet. You are responsible for every aspect of your pet's daily care and care of the teeth becomes more important as we expect our pets to live longer and longer.

Brushing your pet's teeth is the main component of home-care. The purpose is to remove plaque before it becomes tartar. Plaque is a slime comprised of bacteria, saliva and food particles which adheres to the teeth and fills the pocket between the tooth and gum. Left undisturbed, plaque rapidly collects minerals from the saliva to form the rock-like brown deposits known as tartar or calculus. By brushing daily, you remove plaque and so tartar builds up slower. As with all things, the results will depend on the effort you give it.

The first step is to have your veterinarian perform a thorough oral examination to determine if there is any dental disease which needs to be treated before you start your brushing program. It would be inadvisable to start brushing your pet's teeth if there was advanced gum disease as you could cause serious damage to the inflamed tissues as well as pain to your pet. Also, brushing will not remove tartar that has already developed.

Once the examination has been completed, your veterinarian will outline the treatment plan. If there is dental disease the plan will include a thorough cleaning of all teeth, both above and below the gum line. Any teeth that have extensive disease beyond the point of being salvageable will have to be extracted. There may well be some

**MANY PETS
REALLY ENJOY
HAVING THEIR
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seriously diseased teeth which might be saved through more extensive procedures and you will need to discuss with your veterinarian what your expectations and desires are regarding the various treatment options.

The only way to properly carry out dental procedures on pets is with them anesthetized. Fortunately, the drugs available today make the anesthetic risk lower than the risk of dental neglect.

Now that we have the teeth clean and healthy, it is up to you to keep them that way. As mentioned before, this is done by brushing your pet's teeth daily. A program is outlined below which will help you get started with this highly rewarding habit.

Bear in mind that these are guidelines, not hard rules. Each animal is

different and so the program may need to be modified to your pet's needs. Some owners can start brushing their pet's teeth on the first day whereas with others, it may take weeks of gradual effort to build up to brushing. Be patient because if you try to progress too rapidly, you might make your pet mouth-shy making it very difficult to proceed.

If handled properly, many animals come to truly enjoy their home-care and the extra time you spend each day with your pet will increase the bond between you.

Guidelines For Dental Home-Care

1. When to start? **As soon as possible.** Eight to 12 weeks old is best. Pets don't need maintenance this young, but by brushing once or twice weekly they will become familiar with the routine when the permanent teeth erupt. It is a good idea to stop brushing while your pet is losing its baby teeth as the mouth will be a bit sore and your poking around with the brush will cause more pain. Once all the permanent teeth are in you can pick up where you left off.
2. The first step is to work with your pet's mouth. With a little patience your pet will soon accept your attention. **Make it fun** for both of you. Use a lot of love and especially praise to gain their confidence. Try to have your practice sessions at the same time each day so your pet gets into a routine. Late in the evening often works well, as everyone involved is generally in a quiet mood then. If your pet is highly motivated by food, try just before dinner with the meal acting as a reward for co-operating.
3. Start by handling the muzzle and tickling the lips and soon you will be able to rub the teeth and gums with your finger. Put a few drops of water, flavored with garlic or garlic salt for dogs and tuna juice for cats, in the mouth daily. They will soon look forward to this treat.
4. Next, use a washcloth or piece of pantyhose, wrapped around the end of your finger and flavored as above, to gently rub the teeth.
5. Finally, use a soft toothbrush to brush the teeth. There are several veterinary brushes available and many human brushes are well suited to animal use as well. Hold the brush at a 45 degree angle to the tooth and brush back and forth or from gum to tip. Brushing the tongue side of the teeth is less critical. Use the garlic water or tuna juice. **Make it a game.**
6. There is an ever growing selection of veterinary tooth washes, pastes and gels. Your veterinarian can help you select the one best suited to your situation. These products all increase the effectiveness of your home-care program but remember, **it's the brushing which does most of the cleaning.** Brushing at least three times weekly is recommended (daily is much better). Human tooth paste is to be avoided as it will cause stomach upset if swallowed. Baking soda, with its very high sodium content can be dangerous to older patients. Hydrogen peroxide can be too harsh for the gums and must not be swallowed.
7. It helps to give abrasive foods and toys such as dry kibble, raw hide strips and dense rubber chew toys. Hill's® Prescription Diet® t/d® and Friskies® Feline Dental Diet® are dry kibble maintenance foods for dogs and cats that has been proven to reduce plaque accumulation. **Avoid natural bones, dried cow hooves and hard nylon toys as these are hard enough to fracture teeth.**
8. By following a consistent program of home-care, you will greatly improve you pet's dental health. This will mean fewer professional cleanings, less tooth loss and a happier, healthier pet. However, please remember that there is no substitute for professional veterinary care. We must work as a team to ensure a long and happy life for your pet.

THANK YOU FOR LETTING US HELP MAINTAIN YOUR PET'S DENTAL HEALTH.