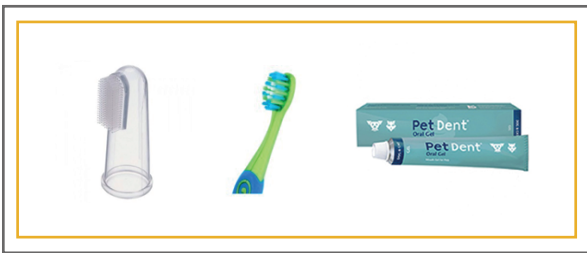




## Guide to brushing your pet's teeth

It is important to take care of your pet's oral hygiene. The best way to do this is to brush your pet's teeth daily to reduce the build-up of plaque. This helps prevent conditions such as gum disease and possible loss of teeth as well as bad breath. It is also important to help maintain their overall health.



### Equipment Required:

- A finger toothbrush
- A children's (or small headed) toothbrush with soft bristles
- Palatable pet toothpaste
- A quiet area to brush teeth

### How to build up confidence whilst brushing teeth:

To get started you need to get into a routine as this will help reduce stress and gives your pet an indication of what is happening. No matter how old your pet is, it is important to start with little steps. Keep the sessions short and stress free and build the time up. Make the experience a positive one for your pet and enjoy the time to bond whilst looking after their health.

For puppies it is still as important to brush the baby teeth just as much as an adult. This allows setting good practice for throughout their lives. Puppies adult teeth push through until around 6 months old so until then gently use a finger toothbrush and toothpaste as this will be soft on the gums.



### Step 1:

Start by setting up your equipment and getting your pet to sit comfortably. Perhaps use a specific mat for them to sit on to give the signal that its toothbrushing time. Place toothpaste on your finger and encourage your pet to lick it off and get familiar with the taste. This will need to be carried out for a couple of days. Once your pet likes the taste you can then move onto the next step.

### Step 2:

Place a small amount of toothpaste on the tip of your finger and lift the side of the animals' muzzle (lip.) You don't need to open their mouths – the lip is very mobile. Slowly rub the paste on the gum line. Start with the easily accessed canine tooth at the front but with time aim to get the molars at the back of the mouth (if there is any risk of being bitten don't carry this step out.) This will help get your pet used to the taste in addition to something being in their mouth. Again, keep practicing this step until your pet is relaxed with it.



### Step 3:

We will now start by placing the toothpaste on the finger brush and let them lick it off. This will help them get used to the texture of the bristles. Once happy you can slowly introduce the brush into the mouth and start to gently brush the teeth. With time move further to reach the back teeth. When brushing the teeth, you need to brush away from the gum line to prevent any bacteria going up into the gum line causing possible infection. Use a circular motion to move the toothpaste around the teeth focusing on back teeth and canines to start with as these are the less sensitive teeth, then move onto the incisors.



### Step 4:

Once they are happy with the finger toothbrush move onto the children's toothbrush as this will help remove the plaque better than the finger brush due to the different strength of bristles. Follow the method of stage 3 on how to brush.

### Step 5:

If you are struggling to brush teeth, then there are other methods that we can use to help with oral hygiene. Before attempting other methods, it is important to contact your veterinary practice and discuss with a veterinary nurse as they will be able to demonstrate how to brush teeth.

### Other methods to reduce plaque build-up:

Some dry diets have been formulated to help reduce the build-up of plaque. Please discuss with your veterinary nurse and they will be happy to give advice on the options. If feeding a wet diet, it is important that your animal drinks plenty of water to remove the excess jelly from sticking on the enamel. Avoid feeding sweet biscuits, treats etc as these can stick to the teeth and cause dental caries (cavities), just like in people.

Your veterinary nurse can also advise on food additives which can help to reduce tartar build up.

Dental treats can influence the animal's health but make sure that they are not used as a primary way of trying to improve dental health, as any treats can make an animal put more weight on rather than helping with teeth. There are other methods and treats that could be used such as carrots as they provide a crunch to help remove plaque as well as used for a nutritional value. However, tooth brushing is gold standard.

Hard chews, bones or antlers can also have a negative effect as they can damage the enamel and wear down teeth. They can also break teeth causing pain and discomfort to the animal, resulting in a need to seek veterinary attention. Use the rule that if you can't indent your thumb nail into the chew then it's too hard to use.

### Toys:

When introducing toys into your animal's life it is important that you select the right ones, making sure you use the same fingernail rule to indent into the toy. This helps give you an idea how much pressure the teeth will be under and possibly be damaged if too hard.

Tennis balls can also damage the teeth. The surface of the tennis ball is very abrasive. This is exacerbated when wet and dirty and acts like sandpaper wearing away the enamel and exposing the dentine beneath.

## Professional Ultrasonic Scaling:

As part of their annual health check your pets' teeth will be examined. Don't be disappointed if you find tartar has built up. Even with scrupulous cleaning there are going to be the hard to reach places in any animal's mouth. Having them cleaned under anaesthesia with survey x-rays is also an important part of maintaining their oral hygiene.

Please never be tempted to have this done with no anaesthetic. Its unethical and the RCVS has issued a statement against this. Not only is it uncomfortable but it doesn't reach under the gumline where the important build up takes place that can damage the teeth. Talk to your veterinary nurse if you want further advice on this topic.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) have released a statement on anaesthesia free dental procedures for cats and dogs.

Visit the link below for more information.

<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/a-statement-on-anaesthesia-free-dental-procedures-for-cats-dogs/anaesthesia-free-dental-procedures.pdf>

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