

Brushing Your Pet's Teeth

Brushing your pet's teeth is one of the best ways to prevent dental disease. This helps prevent plaque and calculus (tartar) buildup and keeps the gingiva (gums) healthy. Although pets will vary in their tolerance, the following hints may make the daily routine of brushing those pearly whites a little easier.

- 1) Set aside time each day that you can devote to brushing your pet's teeth. To start, lift her lip as is if you were examining the teeth. Give a small, tasty treat immediately following the "lip lift." Repeat this process many times in any given session. As your pet becomes more tolerant of this "lip lift" exercise, gradually increase the length of time you hold the lip up. Work up to a point where your pet will tolerate this "lip lift" exercise for a minute or so.
- 2) Once your pet tolerates your dental exam, place a small amount of pet toothpaste on your finger and begin to rub it along the teeth and gum line. As in step one, do this for only a few seconds and follow with a treat. Repeat the process multiple times in a given session. Gradually extend the number of seconds that your pet will allow you to rub her gums.
- 3) Now that your pet is used to having his mouth handled, try the same procedure with a finger-cap or a pet toothbrush. You will need to use the same process as in step two because the toothbrush will feel different than your finger. Place a small amount of toothpaste on the brush and start brushing for only a few seconds followed by a treat. Again, gradually increase the amount of time you brush his teeth. Work up to the point where you can brush your pet's entire mouth in one sitting. Brushing all surfaces of the teeth is ideal, but the outside of the teeth is the most important since most calculus buildup occurs there. If you are unable to brush all of the teeth, concentrate on the canines (fangs) and upper back molars. We see the heaviest tartar buildup on these teeth. There are small brushes for cats and larger ones for dogs. Ask one of the staff members for a free toothbrush from Token Creek Veterinary Clinic.
- 4) Be sure to use pet toothpaste, not human toothpaste. Pet toothpaste foams less, does not contain Fluoride (which can be harmful if swallowed), and tastes better (to the animal that is!).

Ideally, teeth should be brushed daily. Studies have shown that plaque growth on teeth peaks at roughly three to four days without brushing, so, the next best schedule would be brushing your pet's teeth every other or every third day. As with people, good oral hygiene will allow your pet to retain its white smile for a lifetime!

The Token Creek Veterinary Clinic Staff