

BRUSHING YOUR PETS TEETH

It is estimated that 80% of dogs and cats over the age of 3 years have periodontal disease. Signs of periodontal disease include bad breath, yellow brown build up of tartar, sore gums and changed eating habits. Bacteria in the tartar can enter the blood stream resulting in heart, liver or kidney damage. One of the best ways to prevent periodontal disease is to train your pet to have their teeth brushed.

STEPS

1) Select the appropriate toothbrush and toothpaste for your pet - avoid human toothpaste as it can cause stomach upsets and pets resent the flavour. Baking soda can be dangerous in pets with heart and kidney disease. Pet toothpaste is flavoured making the process more enjoyable and it contains enzymes which help to control the tartar. Choose either an ultra soft brush designed for children or a brush designed for pets (finger toothbrush/handled toothbrush). Let your pet lick the tooth brush several times a day to get them liking the paste.

2) Get your pet used to you handling their mouth - stroke and praise them whilst you rub/massage the large front teeth with a wash cloth, a piece of gauze, a cotton tip or your finger (take care if your pet is a biter!). Initially these can be flavoured with tuna or chicken/beef stock. Make these sessions short and pleasurable for the pet. Avoid over restraining them. Repeat several times a day for several weeks until your pet accepts it then slowly start moving towards the back teeth.

3) Once the pet is accepting the teeth being rubbed/massaged start using the tooth brush - again start at the front of the mouth - the brush can be dipped in tuna juice or beef stock to start. Once comfortable with the procedure start using special animal toothpaste.

The toothbrush should be moved in an oval/circular pattern with the bristles directed at a 45 degree angle to the gums. Brush 3-4 teeth at a time using approx 10 back and forth motions before moving onto the next teeth. You should pay most attention to the outside of the upper teeth especially the large molars and canines and at the site where the tooth and gum meets.

With patience and reassurance most pets will enjoy the process and look forward to the "treat" of having toothpaste applied. *Handy hint* - toothpaste can also be applied to chew toys (eg kong toys).

Pets like routines so:

- 1) Try and do it every day
- 2) Try and do it at the same time every day and preferably in the same place
- 3) The younger you start the easier it usually is
- 4) Make it positive - if you link this behaviour to positive things eg food (dinner, a favorite treat), play time, a walk etc you will increase the likelihood of acceptance
- 5) Go slowly, don't force it, don't over restrain them. Start with just short periods of handling the mouth, use lots of praise

Brushing will greatly improve periodontal health, it will not totally eliminate the need for dental scaling and polishing but it will reduce the frequency. Although daily brushing is the ideal its not often realistic however its been found that brushing 3 times a week reduces plaque by 90% so it is worthwhile.

For more information or a free demonstration please ask one of our staff.