



FEATURE

# Dental Hygiene in Dogs

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Dental hygiene is crucial for preventing dental diseases in dogs. Find out how to take care of your dog's teeth at home and what to expect at the vets.

Oral hygiene is important for dogs, even though for many owners it doesn't seem so. Their dental health is certainly related to their overall well-being, as teeth and gum problems in dogs can be caused by, or can cause other health issues in the body.

Not only should dogs be taken to the vet at least once a year for a dental checkup but you can also take care of your dog's dental hygiene at home in several ways.

## How to Practice Dog Dental Hygiene?

Taking care of your dog's dental hygiene is important to prevent various dental problems like bad breath, tooth decay and periodontal disease. Even though many people find it silly, brushing dogs' teeth is one of the most effective ways to go about it.

Brushing your dog's teeth using dog toothpaste two or three times a week will help you prevent tartar buildup and maintain good hygiene. Besides brushing, your dog will love dental chew toys that are made specifically for cleaning their teeth, so it's not bad to get some of those.

Water additives are also helpful in reducing plaque in a dog's mouth and are very easy to use without disturbing your dog's routines. However, maybe the most important is to maintain overall health and provide a healthy diet to your dog, which will also preserve its teeth.

## What Are Possible Dental Problems in Dogs?

Several things can go wrong in your dog's mouth causing various dental issues and diseases:

- Tartar buildup is a very common problem but is not difficult to prevent. It appears when food residue and bacteria accumulate over time and creates a coating over a dog's teeth. Hardened layers of tartar can harm the teeth and cause other health issues in a dog's mouth.
- Bad breath is common in dogs, but shouldn't be neglected as it can be a sign of dental problems. It is usually caused by bacteria in dogs' mouths, bad dental hygiene, periodontal disease or other health issues.
- Gingivitis or the inflammation of the gums is caused by a bacterial infection, leading to swelling, redness and bleeding of the gums.
- Tooth decay is also caused by bacteria that create acid and damage tooth structure bringing pain, cavities and in the end, tooth loss.
- Periodontal disease affects dogs' gums or the roots of their teeth. It appears due to a bacterial infection and can lead to tooth loss, or even problems with the jaw.
- Broken teeth usually occur due to trauma, weakened teeth and chewing on hard objects. Fractures cause pain and can lead to further infections.
- Malocclusion is a condition that occurs when a dog's teeth and jaws are misaligned. That makes difficulties with chewing and eating and brings dental problems.
- Tumours can cause pain and swelling in a dog's mouth. Depending on whether they are benign or malignant, they can bring more or less harm to a dog.



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### The Usual Causes of Dogs' Dental Problems

Some causes of dental diseases can be prevented, but some are simply inevitable. If you don't take care of your dog's dental hygiene regularly, plaque and tartar will appear, followed by other dental problems.

You can also control what you are feeding your dog and take care to provide a healthy and balanced diet, which will maintain overall health and support dental care.

Unfortunately, there are some things you can't do much about. Sometimes dental issues will occur because of a dog's genetics, age, or experienced trauma and in those cases, you should pay special attention to their teeth.

### How to Notice Dental Problems?

Any change in your dog's behaviour or signs of irritation should make you check your dog's teeth or take it to the vet.

If you notice any of the following symptoms in your dog, you are probably dealing with some kind of dental problem:

- Bad breath
- Teeth that are broken or discoloured
- Unusual drooling, chewing, or dropping food
- Swelling in the mouth
- The dog doesn't let you touch its head
- Reduced appetite or dog doesn't eat

Carefully examine a dog's mouth because dental sensitivity can make animals irritable and want to bite.



### Are There Dentists for Dogs?

If you ever wondered if there are dentists for dogs, the answer is - yes. Some veterinarians who specialised in dental care are professionals in diagnosing and treating dental issues in dogs and other animals.

However, most regular vets can check dogs' teeth and provide dental services like cleaning or teeth extractions. If you believe your dog has dental problems, it is perfectly fine to visit your regular vet to find out what it is about and get the treatment.

### What Does a Veterinary Dental Checkup Look Like?

When you take your dog for a dental checkup, a vet will perform an oral examination of your dog's mouth. X-rays are often used as many dental problems can be hidden in the roots of the teeth, in the gums and in the jaw.

A dental checkup usually includes cleaning, scaling, and polishing of the dog's teeth and it is done under anesthesia. All dentist appointments are unpleasant and for dogs, they are unbearable. That's why general anesthesia keeps them away from feeling the stress and discomfort of it and allows the vets to complete all the necessary procedures.

Dental cleanings remove plaque and tartar and are therefore very useful for dogs. After receiving the anesthetic, the vets will closely monitor your pet during the procedure, so there is no need for worries. Further on, the vet will perform the x-rays, and continue by using an ultrasonic scaler to remove plaque and tartar from the teeth.

If the vets suspect other dental issues, they may use the chance to perform other examinations or proceed with removing certain teeth, or make repairs and fillings. After these dental procedures are completed, most dogs will be able to get back to their usual condition quickly and be ready to go home the same day.

**Images:** Above: Examining a dog's teeth needs to be done carefully.

Opposite page: 'Dental checkup usually includes cleaning, scaling, and polishing of the dog's teeth, and it is done under anesthesia.'





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## How to Take Care of a Dog's Teeth at Home

Prevention is always the key to avoiding health and dental problems. Cleaning your dog's teeth removes plaque and bacteria from its mouth, prevents diseases and can postpone your visits to the vet.

There are several ways to clean your pet's teeth and many useful dental products that can help you with this:

### BRUSHING

#### ● When to start?

It's not a bad idea to start brushing a dog's teeth when they are a puppy. Even if this isn't the case, and the dog wasn't introduced to a toothbrush that early, you need to begin gradually, while positively rewarding your dog every step of the way.

#### ● What to use?

Make sure you use a specifically made dog toothbrush that wouldn't hurt their mouth and special dog toothpaste that will have an appealing taste for dogs and be safe for them to swallow.

***\* Never use toothpaste and brushes made for humans. Although they may look similar, they are very different and could be dangerous for your dog's health.***

Petz Park has some of the best dog dental products you can find. They are made with care for dogs of all ages and breeds, to keep their teeth effectively clean and healthy.



## How to Take Care of a Dog's Teeth at Home

### • How to do it?

Teach your dog that brushing its teeth is something good and to trust you in that process. A good first step will be to make the dog rest their head in your hand or on your lap. Keep a treat in your other hand and reward the dog when it does it right.

Repeat this action a few times, and don't hesitate to use the words 'good' or 'yes'. When your dog starts to get it, repeat the action several more times but reduce the threat until you don't have it anymore in your hand.

When the dog has learned to place its head on your palm, try touching the outer side of your dog's lips gently, and also reward it with a treat.

By repeating this, start to extend the time you are touching the dog's lips and slightly touch both the upper and lower jaw.

The next step is to touch the inside of its mouth by slowly sliding your fingers over the dog's gums. Each of these new short steps should reward your dog with a treat. Take your time and practise slowly. Your dog might not like this at first, but should slowly become more and more relaxed.

After you feel your dog is comfortable with the previous step, try placing your hand gently on top of its snout. Of course, the reward follows until the dog is relaxed and allows you to briefly lift its lips.

When you pass that step, you should be able to lift both the dog's lower and upper lip and start touching its teeth and gums without opening the dog's mouth. This should be enough for you to start brushing your pet's teeth.

Use the brush gently, first without applying any toothpaste, and just start brushing a few teeth circularly. Very slowly, progress towards brushing all of the teeth and reaching the gums.

The last step is to introduce your dog to the toothpaste. Let it smell and taste it first before you put it in its mouth and start brushing.

### DENTAL WIPES

Another teeth-cleaning technique for dogs can be tooth wipes. They are placed on a finger and allow you to clean your dog's teeth by rubbing them. Dental wipes will remove plaque like the brushes but are maybe not as good because they can't clean all the little nooks and spaces between the teeth.

### DOG DENTAL TREATS

Dog dental treats are a very good and easy way of caring for your pet's teeth. Your dog will love them and they are made specifically to clean the teeth from plaque and freshen the breath.



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They come in many different flavours, shapes, and sizes, so there will be plenty of options to choose from. You can even put a little bit of dog toothpaste on the treat and your pup will enjoy its teeth cleaning time while chewing on a delicious treat.

### DENTAL CHEW TOYS

Dogs' chew toys keep them entertained and mentally stimulated, while also naturally cleaning their teeth from plaque. Chewing and gnawing are dogs' natural habits and you should use the chance and provide your pet with dental toys that it will love.

There are many different kinds of toys, made of various materials. You can look for some made of natural materials or meat, like chicken strips or bully sticks, that are very good for dogs' dental health. Still, if you'd like something that isn't food and contains no calories, find rubber or nylon toys for your dog.

### DENTAL POWDER & WATER ADDITIVES

Dog dental powder works against the bacteria that help plaque buildup as it is a type of probiotic that will increase the healthy bacteria in a dog's mouth. The powder is added to the dog's food daily and will also help with breath freshening.

Water additives are similar. They are added to a dog's water bowl and help remove bacteria and decrease tartar buildup. There are different types of water additives on the market, but all of them should be tasteless and dogs won't notice them while drinking water.

### IS THERE A DIET FOR DOGS' DENTAL HEALTH?

As mentioned before, a balanced diet containing healthy dog food is very important for overall health. Feeding your dog scraps of human food or sugary treats will surely harm your dog's mouth and its dental health and should be completely avoided.

Besides the regular healthy diet, there are diets specifically created for dogs with some dental diseases (like a periodontal disease) by veterinary nutritionists. These kinds of foods and diets should, of course, be prescribed by a veterinarian before you give some of these formulas to your pet. This food will usually contain elements that kill and remove bacteria in dogs' mouths and clean their teeth from plaque.

### REGULAR CHECK-UPS & DENTAL CLEANINGS

Just as for humans, no matter how well we brush our teeth and take care of them, we still need to visit the dentist from time to time. The same works for dogs. Maintaining dental hygiene for your dog at home is important but you should still visit your vet for occasional dental checkups and cleanings.

Regular visits to the vet will also increase the chances of noticing and diagnosing any health issues your dog might have and getting properly prescribed treatment on time.

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