

# Pet Dental Health is a Reason to Smile

## PVMA FACT SHEET



Dog breath? It could be the sign of something more serious. Periodontal disease in our pets is the most common health problem that veterinarians see, yet many pet owners are still in the dark about preventing it or treating it. Don't think that because your pet isn't showing signs of oral discomfort that everything is fine. Untreated oral disease can be dangerous to your pet's health and much more expensive to correct down the road than paying for preventive measures now. Brushing your pet's teeth may sound silly, but it's the best way to keep their mouth clean. Untreated oral disease can lead to infection that can spread to your pet's heart, lungs, and kidneys. Only your veterinarian can tell you if your pet's mouth needs a professional cleaning, but if not, there are simple ways you can keep those pearly whites clean at home.

### Know What to Look For

Examine your pet's mouth regularly for warning signs which can include brown colored teeth; swollen, red, or bleeding gums; continued bad breath; broken and/or loose teeth; pus near the gum line; or any unusual growths. Non-visual signs can include reluctance to chew or eat, reluctance to drink cold water, and avoidance of chew toys or playing. If you notice any of these signs, consult your veterinarian.

### What You Can Do at Home

Dry dog foods and hard biscuits can help scrape the teeth clean, but brushing the teeth is the best option. Starting to brush teeth when your pet is young can help with acceptance, but most pets can be acclimated to brushing over time. Start by just putting your finger in the mouth and rubbing the gums gently with your finger. Dipping your finger in chicken or beef bouillon (for dogs) or tuna

water (for cats) to entice them to allow you to put your finger in their mouth. Once they are comfortable with that, try wrapping your finger in gauze and lightly rubbing the teeth, focusing mostly on the gum line. Once they are comfortable with the gauze, try moving on to brushing.

Use a toothbrush designed for pets or get an ultra-soft toothbrush for humans. Never use toothpaste designed for people; always use a specially formulated dog/cat toothpaste to avoid upsetting their stomach. Try to hold the bristles of the brush at a 45 degree angle, and be sure to scrub the gum line where food particles can hide and odor and infection begin. You can find a list of animal products approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council at [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org).

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) recommends the following procedure for brushing your pet's teeth:

1. Place your hand over your pet's muzzle from the top
2. Gently squeeze and push his lips on one side between the back teeth (to keep his mouth open)
3. Pull his head back gently so his mouth opens
4. Brush his teeth on the opposite side
5. Repeat this process for the other side

It's important, too, to keep brushing sessions short and as stress-free as possible. Sometimes wrapping your pet in a bath towel or blanket can make them feel safer. If you're still unsure about how you should be brushing, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has a step-by-step video at [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org) which can give you some instruction and additional information.

