

How to Brush Your Pet's Teeth



Step One: Find the Right Time
Brush your pet's teeth when she's calm and relaxed. Set a routine. Working up to brushing daily is ideal, but if her mouth is healthy, even three days a week can make a difference. Without brushing, plaque can build up and put your pet at risk for bad breath, gum

disease, and tooth decay. It can also cause painful infection and life-threatening conditions, when severe.



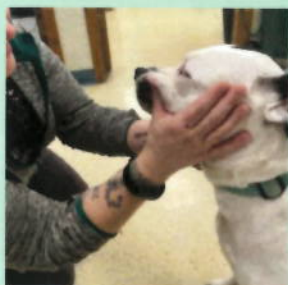
Step Two: Gather Your Tools
You'll want to use a soft toothbrush made for dogs or cats. Finger brushes can work well for cats and smaller breeds. For large dogs, longer handles can give you better reach. Be sure to use pet toothpaste, too.

It comes in tasty flavors like poultry or peanut butter. Never use human toothpaste; it contains ingredients that may hurt your pet's stomach.



Step Three: Assume the Position
Make sure you're in a spot where your pet is comfortable. Don't stand above your pet, hold her down, or take a threatening stance. Instead, try kneeling or sitting in front of or to the side of her. Gauge your pet's anxiety level. If she seems upset,

stop, and try again later. You may need to work on mastering each of the following steps over time.



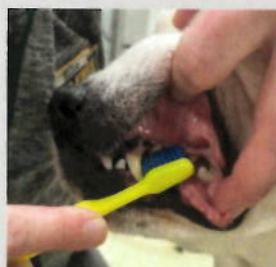
Step Four: Get Her Gums Ready
Test your pet's willingness to have you touch her mouth by rubbing your finger along her upper gums and teeth. This will help her get used to the feel of something against her teeth. Use light pressure. You may need to get her comfortable with this over a few sessions before moving on.



Step Five: Test the Toothpaste
Put some pet toothpaste on your fingertip. Let your pet lick the toothpaste from your fingertip and then the toothbrush so that she can get used to the texture and taste. If after a few days she refuses to lick more toothpaste after her initial taste, try a different flavor. Hopefully, you'll find one she sees as a treat.



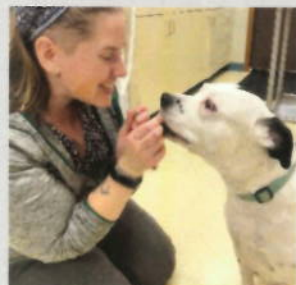
Step Six: Try the Toothbrush
When your pet is used to you opening and touching her mouth, start using the toothpaste and toothbrush together. Lift her upper lip. As you approach her teeth with the brush, angle the bristles so they reach the gum line. Placing them at a 45-degree angle against her teeth will help the bristles massage the gum line and clear away plaque.



Step Seven: Use a Circular Motion
Brush in small circles, getting top and bottom on each side. As you move the bristles along the gum line, some light bleeding may occur. Slight bleeding every so often is okay, but ongoing or heavy bleeding may mean you're brushing too aggressively or it may be a sign of gum disease.



Step Eight: Focus on the Plaque
Brush a few teeth at a time, working up to more each day. Aim for two minutes total. If your pet resists at first, try starting on the outsides of the canine and back teeth, where plaque tends to collect. If you can get the insides, great. But if you can't get to them as well, don't stress too much. Her coarse tongue helps keep that area cleaner.



Step Nine: Be Reassuring
Keep the mood light while you're brushing your pet's teeth. Talk to her throughout your daily brushing, telling her exactly what you're doing. Praise her for being good. If you're tense, your pet will pick up on it, and brushing won't be fun for either of you.



Step Ten: End on a Positive Note
When you're finished brushing your pet's teeth, reward her with her favorite treat, toy or extra attention. *Always stop when everyone's still having fun.* Also remember that good dental care doesn't end with brushing. Certain chews and treats can also help you fight plaque buildup. And don't forget to talk to your vet about how often to schedule regular professional dental cleanings.