

Brushing Teeth & Home Dental Care

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Brushing your cat's teeth should not be a chore for you or your cat. Instead, it should be an enjoyable time for both of you. If you take things slowly at the beginning and give lots of praise, you and your cat will start looking forward to your brushing sessions. But first, we need to gather together what we will need.

Toothpastes and rinses

There are many pet toothpastes on the market today. Make sure you use a pet toothpaste. Toothpastes designed for people can upset your cat's stomach. Pet toothpastes may contain several different active ingredients. Various veterinary dentists have recommended those toothpastes, gels, and rinses that contain chlorhexidine, hexametaphosphate, or zinc gluconate. For cats with periodontal disease, fluoride treatments or toothpastes may be prescribed by your veterinarian. (Please do not use any human fluoride containing toothpastes on your pet.) Flavored toothpastes can make toothbrushing more acceptable to pets.



Toothbrushes, sponges, and pads

The real benefit of toothbrushing comes from the mechanical action of the brush on the teeth. Various brushes, sponges and pads are available. The choice of what to use depends on the health of your cat's gums, the cooperation of your cat, and your ability to clean the teeth.

Use toothbrushes designed specifically for pets – they are smaller, ultra-soft, and have a somewhat different shape. Finger toothbrushes that do not have a handle, but fit over your finger, may be easier for some people to use. Pet toothbrushes are available through our company, your veterinarian, or some pet stores. For some cats, starting out with dental sponges or pads may be helpful since they are more pliable. Dental sponges have a small sponge at the end of a handle, and are disposable. They are softer than brushes. Dental pads can help remove debris from the teeth and gums but do not provide the mechanical action that brushes do.

Where to begin

Number one, this should be fun for you and your cat. Be upbeat and take things slowly. Do not overly restrain your cat. Keep sessions short and positive. Be sure to praise your cat throughout the process. Give yourself a pat on the back, too! You are doing a great thing for your cat!

1. First, have your cat get used to the taste of the toothpaste. Toothpastes for cats usually have a poultry, tuna, or other flavor so your cat will like the taste. Get your cat used to the flavor and consistency of the toothpaste. Let your cat lick some off your finger. Praise your cat when he licks the paste and give a reward (really tasty treat). If your cat does not like the taste of the toothpaste, you may need to try a different kind. Continue this step for a few days or until your cat looks forward to licking the paste.
2. The next step is to have your cat become comfortable with having something placed against his teeth and gums. Apply a small amount of paste to your finger and gently rub it on one of the large canine teeth in the front of the mouth. These are the easiest teeth for you to get at and will give you some easier practice. Be sure to praise your cat and give a tasty treat or other special reward (e.g., playing with an interactive toy!).
3. After your cat is used to the toothpaste, and having something applied to his teeth, get him used to the toothbrush or dental sponge you will be using routinely. We need to get your cat used to the consistency of these items, especially the bristles on a brush. So, let your cat lick the toothpaste off of the brush so he gets used to the texture. Again, praise your cat when he licks the paste and give a really great treat or other reward. Continue this step for about a week, making sure your cat readily licks the paste off of the brush.



4. Now your cat is used to the toothbrush and toothpaste and having something in his mouth. So the next step is to start brushing. Talk to your cat in a happy voice during the process and praise your cat at the end. Lift the upper lip gently and place the brush at a 45° angle to the gumline. Gently move the brush back and forth. At first, you may just want to brush one or both upper canine teeth. You do not need to brush the inside surface of the teeth (the side towards the

tongue). The movement of the tongue over the inside surfaces keeps them relatively free of plaque. Be sure to praise your cat, end on a good note and give a tasty treat or other great reward.

5. When your cat accepts having several teeth brushed, slowly increase the number of teeth you are brushing. Again, by making it appear to be a game, you both will have fun doing it.

How often?

Certainly, the more often you brush the better. Always aim for daily dental care for your cat, just as you aim for daily dental care for yourself. The hardest thing about home dental care for cats is just getting started. Once you have done it for a while, it just becomes part of your daily routine. If you cannot brush daily, brushing every other day will remove the plaque before it has time to mineralize. This will still have a positive effect on your cat's oral health.

Other dental care items

Food: Studies show that hard kibbles are slightly better at keeping plaque from accumulating on the teeth. There are veterinary dentist-approved foods on the market: t/d made by Hill's - the Science Diet people, and Friskies Dental Diet. Research studies have shown that cats eating these foods have less plaque and calculus build-up.

Avoid feeding cats table scraps or treats that are sweet because they can increase the buildup of plaque and tartar, and can lead to other health problems.

Treats: There are some dental chews on the market that are specifically designed to help control plaque and tartar buildup. Look for dental chews accepted by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC).