

Dental Care

Why Dental Care is Important

Dental care is an often-overlooked aspect of pet care, but it is just as important in animals as it is in people. There is a good chance your pet will have some degree of dental disease by the time they are three years of age. If left un-addressed this dental disease will progress throughout the years. The good news is that there are steps you can take at home to prevent dental disease.

Tooth Brushing

The gold standard of care is daily tooth brushing. When started at a young age this task can become a familiar and easy part of you and your pet's daily routine. The key to success is making it a positive experience for your pet. Here are a few tips to get started:

- Select a soft toothbrush or purchase one designed for pets.
- Do not use human toothpaste. Pet toothpaste is designed to be safe if swallowed and taste good to your pet.
- Take it slow. Start by lifting your pet's lip and giving a treat. Rub a little toothpaste on only one tooth, then offer a treat. It may take several days before your pet willingly accepts a full tooth brushing, that's ok, just continue to offer treats as you make progress.
- Work up to using a brush and toothpaste and gently brushing the outer surfaces of the teeth. A full tooth-brushing should only take about 30 seconds a day.

Alternatives to Brushing

If your pet does not tolerate tooth brushing, dental chews are the second-best option. Dental chews can be purchased in pet stores and online. Look for chews that have the VOHC seal of approval, which means they are tested to ensure they prevent tartar buildup. Keep in mind these chews only work if your pet takes the time to chew them thoroughly. If your pet is swallowing a treat whole or in large pieces, it is not helping to clean the teeth and should not be used. These types of chews are most effective when given daily, infrequent use will not do a whole lot to keep the teeth clean.

Long-term Dental Care

Even with optimal at-home dental care, your dog or cat may at some point require a teeth cleaning. Oral health checkups are an important part of annual examinations. When your pet is seen for their annual check-up, your veterinarian will discuss any dental recommendations with you based on their exam. Ignoring your pet's dental health can lead to infection, pain and costly dental procedures in the future. As always, prevention is the best medicine.