



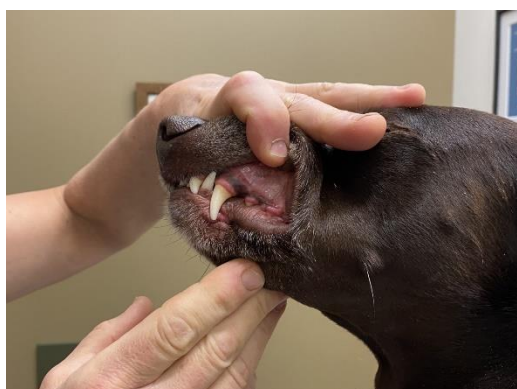
Introducing Toothbrushing – Client Handout

Periodontal disease is the most common medical issue in cats and dogs, with current studies showing that up to 90% of pets are affected. Scientific research over the past decade has shown this disease can have a detrimental impact on your pet's quality of life. Prevention of this infection is something you can do every day to improve their oral health. Just like you, your pet needs protection from plaque, which is the cause periodontal disease. You can protect your pet, as easily as you protect yourself, through daily toothbrushing!

Introducing toothbrushing to your pet can have its challenges – there's the time factor, knowing how to do it effectively, and will your pet allow it. Follow these easy steps to successfully introduce toothbrushing into your pet's daily routine. When is the best time to start brushing your pet's teeth? Either when they are 6 to 7 months of age after their adult teeth have erupted or following a professional dental cleaning with their veterinarian. However, training should start from day one (see below).

Habits are hard to start, but easy to break. Choose a time of the day that will be easy for you to stick to. You could try your pet's mealtime, before bed or first thing in the morning. It takes less than 2 minutes to brush your pet's teeth so set yourself the goal to make this happen *every* day. You only need brush your pet's teeth once each day so find a time that suits you, and your pet. Further, once you have started brushing, keep at it. Making it a habit/ritual makes it easier on you AND your pet.

Successful toothbrushing starts with these easy steps:



STEP 1 - Touch your pet's face

Start with training your pet to accept your hands around their face and mouth. Gently stroke each side of their face ending with lifting their top lip (Figure 1). When your pet accepts this comfortably, you are ready for the next step. Give your pet their favourite treat or toy as reward.



STEP 2 - Touch the Teeth

Introduce your index finger into your pet's mouth while gently stroking the face, lifting the top lip and touching a top tooth (try the canine (fang) tooth on each side). (Figure 2) Each day aim to touch an extra tooth until you can touch most or all their teeth. Again, reward your pet their favourite treat.



STEP 3 - Gently Massage the Gums

The most important area of the tooth to clean is along the gumline. Change your touch of the tooth to a gentle massage along the gumline. You can use a veterinary recommended finger style toothbrush and toothpaste at this stage. (Figure 3) Let your pet sniff and taste the paste first to ensure they like the flavour! Alternatively, dip the brush into some tuna juice or chicken stock to encourage your pet's acceptance.

STEP 4 - Transition to Toothbrush

Your vet can recommend a safe and effective toothbrush specific to your pet's needs. A Child's toothbrush is an ideal alternative as the bristles are soft and gentle on your pet's gums. Things may take a backward step when you first introduce the toothbrush. Therefore, start with the toothbrush Step 2 – touch one tooth at a time until your pet is comfortable again. Then you can start to gently massage along the gumline with the bristles as your pet becomes more comfortable. (Figure 4) Have your pet's favourite treats ready!

STEP 5 - Regular Checkups

While it is often said that the outside is the most important, the inside of the teeth should be brushed if possible. The best way to accomplish this is to place a finger behind the lower canine where there are very small teeth and this will usually cause the pet to open their mouth allowing access to the inside. If they won't allow it, don't ruin your progress and stay with the outside.

Your pet is already accustomed to having things in their mouth because they use their mouth the way you use your hands. Pets will often be very accepting of their owner's hands around their face and mouth if you go slowly and gently giving your pet time to become accustomed to it. Always go at your pet's pace and if you feel your pet is too uncomfortable, stop there and try again the next day. Toothbrushing won't be successful overnight, it may take a few weeks of trying each day until your pet is completely comfortable. The slower and more gently you go, the more successful you will be!

Unlike you, your pet can't call the dentist when they have a toothache so schedule regular (annual) checkups with your vet to ensure your pet has the best care for their oral health. Cats and dogs can suffer from many other oral conditions so a professional assessment should be carried out regularly as part of your pet's oral health routine. If you have any concerns, contact your vet for advice.

For more information on the work of the WSAVA Global Dental Committee, visit wsava.org/committees/global-dental-committee