

The Cat Doctor

How to Brush the Teeth – 4 Step Process

Brushing your cat's teeth is the key to maintaining good oral hygiene. As a result, dental cleaning procedures at your veterinarian are less likely to be needed, bad breath is reduced, and it helps prevent periodontal disease (a painful condition that occurs when inflammation affects the gums).

The purpose is to remove plaque (bacterial deposits) before it becomes tartar (rock-like deposits). Tartar cannot be removed by any amount of brushing. As with all things, results depend on your effort and on a pet's predisposition to developing plaque.

Getting Started

Equipment/materials needed: Pet toothbrush or child's/pediatric toothbrush & Pet toothpaste. It is important to use toothpaste formulated specifically for pets as human toothpaste is to be avoided.

Troubleshooting

It is easy to train pets when they are young to enjoy having their teeth brushed. With older cats, a complete dental cleaning by your veterinarian may be required prior to initiating tooth brushing.

Procedure

Make it fun for both of you. Use a lot of love and praise to gain their confidence. Try to brush the teeth at the same time each day so your pet gets into a routine. The evening can work well if everyone involved is in a quieter mood.

The goal is to slowly acclimate your kitty to the toothpaste and toothbrush. Do each step for one week before moving on the next step. Always immediately follow each step with a tasty food or treat as a reward. If your pet is highly motivated by food, try just before dinner, with the meal acting as a reward for cooperating.

Week 1: Becoming familiar

The goal is to have your cat become familiar with the toothbrush and toothpaste. Leave them out and let your kitty sniff and accept them as familiar non-threatening items. Each day put a tiny bit of toothpaste on your finger and let him lick it off. If he does not accept it, then smear a small amount on his paw so he gets the taste of it when grooming.

Week 2: The toothpaste

Using your finger, apply a small amount of the toothpaste to one of the canine (fang) teeth.

Week 3: The toothbrush

Place some toothpaste on the toothbrush and let him lick it off. If he is shy about licking, then go ahead and dab some paste near his mouth.

Week 4: Brushing

Now you can start brushing the teeth. Gently stretch his lips far back enough to allow you to place the brush between the cheek and the gums. Place the bristles of the brush at about a 45° angle to the teeth and gently move the brush around on the crevice where the teeth and gums meet. The direction of the brushing does not matter. Move quickly on the upper and lower teeth before your kitty loses his patience. Fortunately, the tongue does a good job of keeping plaque off the inner aspect of teeth, so only the outside aspect of the teeth (towards the cheek) needs brushing.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a complete dental?

This is a complete periodontal and endodontal treatment for your cat. Pets are placed under anesthesia and continuously monitored. The teeth are cleaned, and the gumline is probed, scaled, and polished. Any teeth that are severely diseased may need to be extracted.

How long will it take for my pet to become used to having his or her teeth brushed?

It depends on the pet; however, it is advised to start with one or two teeth per day, slowly working your way around the mouth. Each day you can add one more tooth. Within several days, it is usually possible to brush the entire mouth in one sitting.

Should I wear gloves when brushing my pet's teeth?

Ideally, yes; medical-grade exam gloves should be worn when working in any bacteria-prevalent area. However, if no gloves are worn, then washing your hands with soap and warm running water when finished should suffice.