



## Tooth Brushing and Oral Care at Home

Regular tooth brushing is the best method of home dental care. Many toothpaste products specifically for pets are available. The toothpaste helps neutralize mouth odors and has enzymes or antibacterial properties to prevent plaque accumulation. Finger toothbrushes can be used to introduce your pet to tooth brushing, and specially designed toothbrushes with soft bristles that fit your pet's mouth are available as well.

First, let your pet get used to the taste of the toothpaste. Using the right toothpaste isn't as important as the physical act of brushing your pet's teeth - but at this stage, you just want your pet to get used to having your hands near her mouth. Offer her a small amount on the tip of your finger and praise her as she licks it off, followed by a really tasty treat. (You can also try a small amount of chicken broth on your finger instead of toothpaste if your pet doesn't like the smell or taste of the toothpaste.) Do a few of these sessions for a few days in a row, until your pet seems comfortable and enjoys the process.

Next, get your pet used to having something placed against her teeth and gums. Apply a small amount of paste to your finger and gently put it on one of her large teeth. Again, be sure to praise your pet and give tasty treats. (Remember, you are trying to teach your pet that brushing teeth is fun and enjoyable.) If your pet seems comfortable with this step you can gently rub your finger against her tooth for a few seconds.

After your pet is comfortable with you touching her mouth and teeth and is accustomed to the taste and feel of the toothpaste, get her used to the toothbrush you will be using. Allow her to look at, smell, and taste the toothbrush. She might not like the texture of the bristles at first, so let her lick a small amount of toothpaste or chicken broth off of it. Again, praise your pet and give her some tasty treats. Repeat this step until it seems routine and enjoyable for your pet.

Now that she's used to her teeth and gums being touched, using the toothpaste, and the toothbrush itself, it's time to start brushing. Lift her upper lip gently and place the toothbrush at a 45 angle to the gum line. Gently move the brush back and forth. Stop here and give more tasty treats to your pet. Repeat this for a few days until your pet seems comfortable. Gradually increase the number of teeth you are brushing, until you are able to brush all the teeth in her mouth.

Remember, patience is the key: move slowly, and always make sure that tooth brushing remains a positive experience for your pet. Daily brushing is ideal, but for many people this option might not be realistic. Just remember that the more often your pet's teeth are brushed, the better it is for her health.