

Animal Medical Center of Lehigh Acres
2920 Lee Boulevard
Lehigh Acres, FL 33971
Oral Hygiene: Cleaning Your Pet's Teeth

1. Oral Hygiene should begin when your pet is just a puppy or a kitten. It's a great idea to start getting them used to having their teeth cleaned at a young age; but it can be done at any age.

NOTE: Be sure that the teeth are initially clean before you start an oral hygiene program. Consult your veterinarian.

2. Select a quiet room in your home so your pet is less likely to be nervous during the procedure.

3. Start by lifting your pet's lip and examining the teeth. Look at all the teeth. Start with the front teeth, or incisors, and work your way back. Check the canine teeth, premolars and molars. Examine the left side, the right side, the upper teeth and then the lower teeth. Next open the mouth and check the inside surfaces, looking for open or worn teeth, as well as bleeding or infected gums. Examining your pet's teeth every day helps your pet get used to these oral hygiene procedures, especially in the initial training stages.

4. To clean the teeth, start by just rubbing your pet's teeth with your finger. This gets them used to having you look into their mouth and manipulate the head and mouth. Be sure to rub the back teeth, this is where most of the plaque builds up. Clean only the outside, or buccal, surface of the teeth. Animals are pretty good at using their tongue to keep the inside or lingual surface clean. Repeat this procedure daily for about 2 weeks. After each session, reward your pet so it becomes a positive experience.

5. After about 2 weeks, your pet will be fairly used to having you examine and rub his/her teeth. Now take a soft cloth or a piece of gauze, and wrap it around the end of your finger. Then rub the teeth with the gauze. You can dip the gauze in canned food gravy or beef bouillon or tuna water to make this more acceptable. Repeat this procedure daily for about 2 weeks. Again, offer a reward at the end of each session to make this a positive experience for your pet.

6. You are now ready to introduce a toothbrush. The use of a toothbrush is the most effective means of cleaning the teeth. Regular care of the teeth will also alert you to any problems early in their development. Get a very soft children's toothbrush, or your veterinarian may recommend one to you.

7. To brush the teeth, begin by lifting the lip and brushing the outside surfaces of the teeth. Pay special attention to the areas along the gumline, as it is beneficial to massage the gums as you brush. Flavored enzymatic toothpastes are available for dogs and cats. Do not use a human toothpaste product, they foam easily and the flavor is distasteful to most pets.

8. Once the animal is used to the toothbrush, the procedure may be done twice a week in most cases. You may need to brush more often if your pet is on a canned diet or prone to dental problem, like most small breeds are.

9. If your pet will not accept the dental cleaning, you may need to investigate other alternatives, such as an oral rinse for pets. Specially designed treats can help as well. Remember, brushing is the gold standard!

10. A special note about cats. Cats may object to the toothbrush. You can try a cotton swab or

sponge tipped eye-shadow applicator to rub his/her gums.