

10 Steps to Brushing Your Dog's Teeth

Dental health is important for your dog.

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Supplies: A nylon-bristle children's toothbrush, rubber finger brush, washcloth or piece of gauze may be used. Pet toothpaste comes in several flavors. Ask your veterinarian if your dog needs one with special abrasives or extra enzymes. Position yourself on one side of your dog's head; use one hand to lift the lip up and the other hand to manipulate the brush. Aim bristles at a 45-degree angle to the tooth, with bristles pointing toward the gum line. This will brush along the crevice where the gum and tooth meet, which is where gingivitis starts. Brush with an oval motion, as you would use brushing your own teeth. Distribute toothpaste over each tooth as you brush to reap the benefit of the enzymes or abrasives. Pet toothpaste is formulated not to foam. Brush all sections of the mouth: upper and lower incisors (front teeth), upper left and lower left arcade, and upper right and lower right arcade. Brush each tooth and pay particular attention to common problem areas: upper canines ("fangs") and upper fourth premolars ("canassials"). These are the large shearing teeth toward the back of the mouth. Brush outer surfaces of all teeth and, if your dog will allow it, the inner surfaces (next to the palate or tongue). Don't worry too much about the inner surfaces, because less plaque builds up here. Examine your dog's mouth for any unusual swelling, chipped or broken teeth, or bleeding gums. Be patient, especially if working on a young puppy just learning the ropes or an older dog that's not accustomed to the routine. Praise your dog! Why not reward it with a tartar-control treat?