



EAST LONGMEADOW ANIMAL HOSPITAL

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How to Brush Your Pet's Teeth

- Dental disease (especially periodontal disease) is the most common disease in pet dogs and cats. It is also one of the most preventable or reducible diseases in our pets by feeding a crunchy diet, providing appropriate chew treats and toys and daily tooth brushing.
- The first step is to start with a clean, healthy mouth, such as with a young pet with healthy new teeth and gums or after your pet had had a professional dental cleaning.
- You will need a soft-bristled toothbrush and veterinary toothpaste. Human toothpastes and baking soda may cause problems with dogs and cats. Veterinary toothpastes have flavors that are appealing to dogs and cats. Anything other than a bristled toothbrush will not get below the gum line (the most important area to brush).
- There are several important facts about our pets' mouths that tell us when, where, and how to brush. Periodontal disease in dogs and cats usually affects the upper back teeth first and worst. Plaque builds up on the tooth surface daily, especially just under the gum line. It takes less than 36 hours for this plaque to become mineralized and harden into "tartar" (calculus) that cannot be removed with a brush. Because of this progression, brushing should be done daily, with a brush to remove the plaque from under the gum line.
- Pick a time of day that will conveniently become part of your pet's and your daily routine. For dogs, just before a walk and for both dogs and cats, before a daily treat can help your pet actually look forward to brushing time. Take a few days to let both of you get used to the process. Follow with praise and a walk or treat each time. Start by offering them a taste of the veterinary toothpaste. The next time, let them taste the toothpaste, and then run your finger along the gums of the upper teeth. Repeat the process with the toothbrush. Get the bristles of the brush along the gum from back to front, making small circles along the gum lines. It should take you less than 30 seconds to brush your pet's teeth. Do not try to brush the entire mouth at first. If all that your pet lets you brush is the outside of the upper teeth, you are still addressing the most important area of periodontal disease prevention. If your pet eventually allows you to brush most of their teeth, so much the better.
- Even with the best tooth brushing, some dogs and cats may still need an occasional professional cleaning, just like humans. By brushing your pet's teeth daily, curtailing the amount of periodontal disease, you may reduce the frequency and involvement of dental cleanings and provide your pet with a healthier, sweeter smile

