



Dog Dental Care: How to Take Care of Your Dog's Teeth



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Published February 10, 2026

Taking care of your dog's oral health is an important part of being a responsible pet parent. Setting up a regular dog dental care routine will help make sure they have clean teeth, fresh breath, and a healthy smile.

In this guide, we'll cover why dental care matters, common causes of dental problems, how to spot early warning signs, and practical steps to keep your dog's mouth healthy.

Key Takeaways

1. Dental disease is common in dogs by age three and can lead to pain, tooth loss, and broader health issues if untreated.
2. Brushing your dog's teeth daily is the most effective way to prevent plaque and tartar buildup that can lead to dental disease.
3. Dental treats that meet the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) standards can help reduce plaque and tartar between brushings.
4. Warning signs that indicate potential dental issues include bad breath, red gums, difficulty eating, and excessive drooling.
5. Professional cleanings under anesthesia allow thorough examination and treatment below the gumline.

Why Dog Dental Care Is Important



Your dog's dental health is about more than fresh breath. Periodontal disease affects most dogs by age three, making it one of the most common health issues they face. A few minutes of dental care each day can help protect your dog from painful dental disease and support a healthier, more comfortable life as they grow older.

When gums become infected, harmful bacteria can spread to the bloodstream and cause serious problems for their heart, liver, and kidneys.

By prioritizing your dog's dental care, you aren't just cleaning their teeth, you're protecting their vital organs and helping to improve their quality of life, appetite, and overall well-being.

Common Causes of Dental Issues

Plaque and Tartar Buildup

Plaque begins to form on teeth within 24 hours after brushing. If it isn't removed quickly, it hardens into tartar within a few days, usually along the gumline.

Once tartar takes hold, no amount of cleaning with a toothbrush can get rid of it. Regular [cleaning by a veterinarian](#) is the only way to remove tartar and, as a result, help prevent dental disease.

Lack of Home Dental Care Routine

Without a regular dental care routine, your canine best friend can develop gingivitis (the earliest stage of dental disease) in as little as one to three weeks.

Home care is the best way to prevent plaque and tartar buildup between professional cleanings. Unfortunately, many pet owners skip this step. Don't make the same mistake.

Make dog dental care a daily habit to stop dental disease before it starts!

Diet and Chewing Habits

What you put in your dog's food bowl affects more than just nutrition! Soft foods, which have a tendency to stick to teeth, can actually lead to faster plaque buildup. On the other hand, VOHC-approved dry kibble and dental treats provide a repetitive cleaning effect.

When your dog chews, the hard texture of the kibble helps scrape away debris that may linger on their teeth. And [dental treats](#) are a fun, easy way to help keep your dog's teeth clean and their breath fresh.

Age

Dental risks increase as your dog ages. In fact, dogs over eight years old are three times more likely to develop dental disease. What's more, [senior dogs](#) often have years of accumulated damage that can add up to big problems. *

That said, it's never too late to start a dog dental care routine. Even for senior dogs, consistent dental cleanings can prevent further pain and improve their golden years.

Signs Your Dog Has Dental Issues



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Your dog's mouth comes into contact with much more than what they eat and drink. The things they lick and carry in their mouth can impact their health, too.

It's a good idea to check their lips, teeth, gums, and tongue for any injuries or abnormalities like swelling or discoloration on a regular basis. If your dog's breath smells bad, that's

another clue you'll want to pay attention to and discuss with your vet.

Here are some of the most common signs that your dog has dental issues.

Bad Breath

Smelly dog breath isn't just something to brush off. It can actually be a red flag that there's a bigger issue at play. In fact, a persistent [foul odor](#) is often a sign that a bacterial infection has taken hold in your dog's mouth.

While some smell is expected, sudden changes or even a sweet, fruity scent can point to serious health issues. Don't ignore the smell! If your dog's breath starts to turn sour, it's time to schedule a professional dental checkup with your veterinarian.

Visible Changes in Mouth

Healthy gums should be pink, not red, swollen, or bleeding. If you see these last three, it could be a sign that your dog has gingivitis.

It's also important to keep an eye out for yellow or brown buildup (tartar) on their teeth, as well as receding gums, loose teeth, or a tooth turning a dull grey (which can indicate a dying tooth).

Spotting these signs early is the best way to [keep your dog's mouth, gums, and teeth healthy](#).

Behavioral Changes

If your dog starts dropping food, chewing on only one side, or loses interest in their favorite hard treats or chew toys, they might be in pain.

Watch for excessive drooling or blood in their saliva, and remember that dental discomfort can turn regular activities into a chore. So, if your dog's chewing behavior suddenly changes, it's a major clue that something may be wrong in their mouth.

How to Take Care of Your Dog's Teeth



Daily Toothbrushing

A quick at-home daily cleaning with a dog-friendly toothbrush and toothpaste is one of the best ways to prevent more serious dental issues from developing.

Check with your veterinarian for recommendations about cleaning your dog's teeth as well as which toothbrushes and toothpastes might be right for your pup.

How to Introduce Brushing

- **Step One:** Let your dog lick a bit of dog-friendly toothpaste from your finger.
- **Step Two:** Using your finger, rub toothpaste over their gums and teeth.
- **Step Three:** Introduce a soft, dog-friendly toothbrush with toothpaste.
- **Step Four:** Gradually increase [brushing](#) time and coverage.

Dental Treats and Chews

Feed your dog snacks and treats made to promote their oral health! Treats like these are specially designed to pair a chewy texture that fights plaque and tartar with tasty flavors dogs love.

One [GREENIES™ Dental Treat](#) a day is a great routine for helping your dog maintain clean teeth and fresh breath.

Diet Considerations

If you have concerns about your dog's oral health, talk to your veterinarian about a prescription diet. These diets feature extra-large kibble that are designed to scrape away plaque as your dog chews. Some even contain special ingredients that block tartar from forming!

But remember: Before introducing any new food into your dog's diet, always talk to your veterinarian to see if it's right for your dog. And keep fresh water available for your dog at all times to help rinse lingering food particles off their teeth.

Water Additives and Oral Rinses

If you're looking for an easy way to boost your dog's dental health and lower the bacteria count in their mouth, try water additives and oral rinses.

Just keep in mind that, while super convenient, these aren't as effective as a good dog dental care routine. Think of them as supplemental tools that can help reach the nooks and crannies of your dog's mouth that you may have missed with the toothbrush.

When shopping for water additives and oral rinses, always look for the VOHC seal to ensure that the product actually works as intended.

Schedule Regular Exams and Cleanings with Your Veterinarian



Your veterinarian has the tools and expertise to professionally clean your dog's teeth and assess any early warning signs to watch out for.

They will ultimately be the best resource for helping maintain your dog's health, so make time to talk with them about creating a helpful oral care routine for your pet.

What to Expect at Your Veterinarian

During an oral exam, your veterinarian will look for warning signs and map out a plan for treatment and prevention.

After that, they'll perform a professional cleaning with your dog under general anesthesia to reach below the gumline, where the real trouble starts.

They may also take dental x-rays to uncover hidden issues, such as bone loss or painful abscesses. If a tooth is too far gone, they may extract the tooth to stop the pain and prevent infection from spreading.

After Treatment

Once your veterinarian gives the “all clear,” you can resume your dog dental care routine at home and incorporate any advice your veterinarian may add. This helps to prevent any problems from recurring.

Make sure to attend all follow-up appointments so your veterinarian can monitor your dog's dental health, and be sure to schedule their annual checkup.

If your veterinarian sees significant issues, they may recommend more frequent visits.

Keep Your Dog's Smile Healthy with GREENIES™ Dental Treats



★Cleaner Teeth after 28 days

Four bags of Greenies Dental Treats are displayed against a green background. From left to right: Sweet Potato Flavor Teenie (43 treats), Fresh Petite (20 treats), Original Regular (12 treats), and Blueberry Flavor Large (8 treats). Each bag features a dog's head, the Greenies logo, and a picture of the treat. The bags are labeled with the number of treats and the weight of the dog they are recommended for.

*When fed daily. Data on file

Building and sticking to a dog dental care routine doesn't have to be difficult! In fact, by using treats, toys, and affection during up-close cleaning time, your routine can be pretty fun for you both.

Daily dental treats make it easier to maintain your dog's oral health between brushings and veterinary visits. [GREENIES™ Dental Treats](#) are designed with a unique chewy texture that helps clean teeth down to the gumline.

They're VOHC-approved for helping control plaque and tartar and are available in multiple sizes for dogs large and small. Just one treat daily (paired with regular brushing) is a great way to fight plaque and freshen breath.

The foundation of a good dog dental care routine is to care for their mouth every day, pay attention to any warning signs, and take your veterinarian's advice. That way, you can enjoy happy dog kisses (with breath that doesn't stink) for years to come!

Contributor

Dena Bley is a registered veterinary technician with 25 years of experience and Sr. Expert Advice Team member. She began her career as a researcher at P&G before joining the Pet Health and Wellness Team at Mars 2014. With deep roots in Ohio, Dena brings over a decade of research experience and a passion for animal care, complemented by her hands-on work with a variety of animals on her family's small farm.

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Frequently Asked Questions

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1. **At what age should I start brushing my dog's teeth?**

The best time to start brushing your dog's teeth is right now! Of course, in an ideal situation, you would start a dog dental care routine during puppyhood. That's when they're much easier to train and may accept a toothbrush with less resistance than adult and senior dogs.

That said, don't worry if your dog is already an adult or a senior. With a little patience and a gradual introduction, they can learn to love brushing time, too.

2. **Can dogs get cavities?**

Cavities are rare in dogs. Instead, they're far more likely to develop periodontal disease or fractured teeth from chewing on hard objects.

So, even though cavities aren't that common, regular veterinarian dental exams are still important. Your veterinarian can spot small problems before they become big, painful problems.

3. **Why does my dog need anesthesia for dental cleaning?**

Unlike you, your dog won't open wide and hold still for a dental cleaning. That's where anesthesia comes in.

After a pre-procedure blood test to make sure your dog is a safe candidate, anesthesia allows your veterinarian to clean below the gumline where disease hides.

It also protects your dog's airway from water and debris while ensuring that the entire process is completely stress- and pain-free for your dog.

4. **How can I tell if my dog has a tooth infection?**

Infections can be difficult to detect, but, more often than not, your dog's behavior will give them away. Watch for major red flags, including swelling on the face or under the eyes. Other signs include drooling, blood in their saliva, or a sudden foul odor.

Additionally, if your dog starts dropping food or only chewing on one side of their mouth, they might be in pain. Get them checked out by a veterinarian to ensure they stay happy and healthy.

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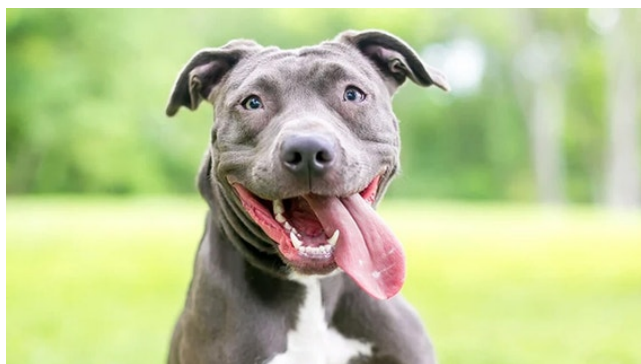
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Dog parents are no strangers to bad breath. From waking up to smelly puppy kisses to being held captive in a car with your dog's stinky breath, you've had your fair share of not-so-fresh breath encounters. But, there's a simple routine you can follow to help get rid of your dogs bad breath.

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Sometimes dogs will look at a lawn or a dog park and see a big, tasty buffet: dirt, grass, poop and who knows what else? Dogs eating odd nonfood items is a relatively common behavior; the condition even has a name: pica. But you keep your pooch well-fed with plenty of tasty, nutritional food, so why would they choose t

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