



Dry vs Wet Dog Food for Dental Health: Which Is Better?



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Dr. Tom explains how diet impacts plaque buildup and what dental care routine your dog really needs

The debate between dry and wet dog food often centers on nutrition and convenience, but there's another important factor: dental health. During a recent Reddit Ask Me Anything session hosted by GREENIES™, veterinarian Dr. Thomas Hamilton (Dr. Tom), DVM, addressed how different diets affect oral hygiene and what it means for your dental care routine.

The Dental Difference Between Food Types

When it comes to dental health, not all dog foods are created equal. Dr. Tom explains: "Dry

food may provide somewhat more mechanical abrasion against tooth surfaces compared to wet food, simply because the crunchy texture provides mechanical action against the teeth."

When dogs chew kibble, the texture creates friction against their teeth, which may provide limited mechanical reduction of plaque accumulation before it hardens into tartar. Wet food offers no such benefit—its soft texture adheres to teeth without providing any cleaning action.

However, Dr. Tom cautions against overestimating kibble's benefits: "It just isn't consistent or targeted enough to replace other forms of dental care."

Why Kibble Isn't Enough

Even for dogs eating dry food, there are significant limitations. "Some dogs do chew their kibble, while others swallow much of it whole," Dr. Tom noted. For dogs that gulp their food, even the potential benefits are lost.

Even dogs that chew thoroughly don't get comprehensive coverage. "Most of the chewing happens with the premolars and molars," Dr. Tom explained. "The incisors and canine teeth, which are very common sites for plaque and tartar buildup, are not really involved in chewing food at all."

The bottom line: while dry kibble provides some mechanical benefit, "it's not a complete solution on its own."

The Soft Food Challenge

For dogs eating wet or soft food, dental care becomes even more critical. "Dogs eating primarily soft food tend to accumulate plaque faster because there is less natural abrasion against the teeth compared to kibble, so consistency with brushing becomes even more important for them," Dr. Tom explained.

This accelerated plaque buildup occurs because soft food generally provides less mechanical abrasion against tooth surfaces compared to kibble diets. Every meal leaves residue without any friction to help remove it, allowing plaque to accumulate and harden more quickly.

Does Diet Change Your Brushing Approach?

When asked whether brushing technique should differ based on diet, Dr. Tom provided clear guidance: "Diet can influence dental health, but the brushing technique itself does not really change."

The fundamentals remain consistent for all dogs: "gentle brushing along the outer surfaces of the teeth where plaque builds up the most, especially near the gumline, using a soft toothbrush or finger brush with veterinary toothpaste."

What does change is urgency and frequency. While technique stays the same, dogs on soft food need more consistent brushing due to rapid plaque accumulation. However, Dr. Tom emphasizes that even kibble-fed dogs need the same care: "Kibble can provide a small amount of mechanical contact, but it is not enough to replace brushing, so both dogs still benefit from the same brushing approach."

Building the Right Routine for Your Dog's Diet For Dogs Eating Wet or Soft Food:

- Daily brushing becomes especially important due to faster plaque accumulation. Daily dental treats may serve as a useful adjunct to support mechanical plaque reduction. More frequent veterinary dental exams may be warranted

Dr. Tom specifically recommends: "For dogs on softer diets, adding a daily dental chew like GREENIES™ Dental Treats can help provide extra mechanical cleaning between brushings since they are designed to encourage chewing and contact along the gumline."

For Dogs Eating Dry Kibble:

- Daily tooth brushing remains one of the most effective at-home methods for plaque control. Kibble helps but cannot prevent dental disease alone
- Daily dental treats supplement the modest benefits
- Regular veterinary monitoring is still essential

Even for kibble-fed dogs, "daily toothbrushing is still the gold standard for maintaining oral health."

The Universal Priority: Consistency Over Perfection

Regardless of diet, Dr. Tom's core message remains constant: "The most important factors are consistency, positive reinforcement, and making the routine something your dog tolerates long term rather than stressing over brushing technique differences between foods."

He recommends "focusing on frequency rather than perfection, aiming for daily brushing if possible or at least several times per week." A dog that tolerates consistent brushing—even if imperfect—will have better long-term dental health than one whose owner attempts perfect technique but can only manage it occasionally.

The Complete Picture

Dr. Tom's comprehensive approach combines multiple habits: "The best approach is usually a combination of habits. Brushing when you can, using dental treats consistently, and keeping up with regular veterinary dental evaluations all work together to support long-term oral health."

This multi-layered strategy includes:

1. **Daily brushing** for targeted, thorough cleaning
2. **Daily dental treats** like GREENIES™ Dental Treats for mechanical cleaning (especially critical for soft-food diets)
3. **Regular veterinary exams** to catch problems developing below the gumline

For dogs on wet food, each element becomes more critical. For dogs on dry food, none becomes optional.

The Bottom Line

The relationship between diet and dental health is real but often misunderstood. Dry food offers some dental advantage over wet food, but this advantage is limited and insufficient as a standalone strategy.

Dogs on soft food require more vigilant dental care due to faster plaque accumulation, but the care itself—brushing technique, dental treats, veterinary monitoring—remains fundamentally the same. The difference lies in urgency and frequency, not methodology.

Regardless of what's in your dog's food bowl, the same principles apply: consistent brushing, regular professional monitoring, and appropriately selected adjunctive dental care products can all support oral health. Diet influences how quickly problems develop, but proper dental care prevents them regardless of what your dog eats.

As Dr. Tom emphasizes, the best dental care plan is one you can realistically maintain while keeping your dog comfortable. Whether you're feeding kibble, soft food, or something in between, that consistency—not the food itself—is what ultimately protects your dog's dental health.



Meet Dr. Tom:

“As the Chief of Staff at Sturbridge Veterinary Hospital in Sturbridge, MA, I’ve spent the last nine years focusing on companion animal care, with a clinical focus on companion animal medicine, surgery, dentistry, and client education...and making veterinary medicine approachable for everyone. My journey into veterinary medicine started with a love for animals as a kid growing up on Long Island and was shaped by my education at UMass Amherst and St. George’s University (including clinical educational experiences affiliated with Cornell University). While I respect my early experience working with large animals, I’ve spent the last 9 years specializing in small-animal care for cats and dogs, which has always been my true passion.”

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