



# The Importance of Your Pet's Oral Health: Bite-Sized Takeaways

Brought to you by Dechra

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Periodontal disease, or gum disease, is an incredibly common condition in dogs and cats, with studies showing that most pets develop some form of periodontal disease by 3 years of age.<sup>1</sup> Periodontal disease can have significant impacts on your pet's health and often goes undetected at home, making oral examinations by a veterinarian important for every pet.

## **What Is Periodontal Disease & Why Is Dental Care So Important?**

Periodontal disease is a result of infection and inflammation of the tissues that surround the tooth.<sup>2</sup> It can result in bad breath (ie, halitosis), bleeding of the gums, reduced appetite, infection, and loose and painful teeth.<sup>3</sup> Although oral pain is often not obvious in pets, it is a common and significant concern for animals with periodontal disease.<sup>1</sup>

Maintaining healthy teeth is also important for overall health, as periodontal disease has been linked to changes in distant organs such as the kidney, liver, and heart.<sup>4</sup> The good news is that, although periodontal disease may be commonly diagnosed in our pets, it is also highly preventable and, to some degree, treatable.

## **How Can Periodontal Disease Be Prevented?**

Similar to humans, diligent oral care can help prevent many of these issues before they occur. Also similar to humans, at-home oral care and routine professional teeth cleanings can help keep the mouth healthy and identify potential oral issues in their earliest stages. At your pet's annual examination, your veterinarian will evaluate your pet's teeth to determine whether they need a professional veterinary teeth cleaning.

Daily toothbrushing is the most important thing we can do for our pets to help maintain their oral health and hygiene.<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that even twice-weekly brushing can remove most plaque before it mineralizes into dental tartar.<sup>5</sup> Most pets can be trained to allow toothbrushing by utilizing a tasty, pet-friendly toothpaste and pet toothbrush. Ask your veterinary team for more tips on implementing this routine for your pet.

In addition to toothbrushing and routine dental cleanings by veterinary professionals, there are other ways to slow the rate of plaque and tartar buildup in dogs, including at-home products.

### Which At-Home Dental Products Should I Use?

There are many foods, chews, wipes, rinses, and treats marketed for improving a pet's dental health, but not all products are created equal. It is important to select a product that carries the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) seal of approval<sup>6</sup>; products that have been awarded the VOHC seal of approval have undergone specific testing and have met a specific set of criteria to ensure they slow the rate of plaque and tartar buildup in pets.<sup>6</sup> Although these products should not replace toothbrushing on a daily basis, they can still provide a way to reduce plaque buildup.

### Options for Dental Care Products

- **Prescription dental diets:** These diets typically have large kibble sizes, which ensure that the pet must chew them prior to swallowing.<sup>5</sup> The kibbles do not shatter when chewed; instead, the teeth sink into the kibble and the plaque gets removed while chewing.<sup>5</sup>

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- **Topical products:** Applied directly to the teeth, products such as Vetradent Spray can help prevent bacteria from attaching to teeth and forming into plaque.<sup>5</sup>
- **Water additives:** Products such as Vetradent can be added directly to your pet's water bowl and can help breakdown dental biofilms. Vetradent Water Additives are also VOHC-accepted for the control of tartar in dogs. Regular use of products carrying the VOHC seal will help reduce the severity of periodontal disease in pets.
- **Dental chews:** Products such as DenTee Stars & DenTee Chews can aid in removing and preventing plaque buildup while satisfying a pet's desire to chew.
- The complete listing of dental care products with the VOHC seal of approval can be found on the VOHC website ([vhc.org](http://vhc.org)).

### Conclusion

Periodontal disease is the most common disease that affects dogs and cats, but it is also one of the most preventable. Although daily toothbrushing and the use of VOHC-accepted dental products can help maintain the integrity of your pet's teeth and gums, your pet can still benefit from comprehensive oral health assessments and cleanings under general anesthesia. If incorporating at-home dental care is new for you and your pet, there is no better time to start than right after a dental cleaning when the teeth have been cleared of tartar and plaque.

### References

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