

DENTAL DIETS

Soft plaque on the teeth turns into hard tartar, and bacteria, food particles, and enzymes invade the gums, causing periodontal disease and a number of related health conditions in dogs and cats. Why do our pets have so many problems with their teeth?

In the wild, the texture of the natural diet helps clean the teeth as the wolf or wildcat gnaws on the hide and sinews of the prey that they devour. There aren't a lot of loose particles of food to cling to the surface of the teeth. There is no doubt that our modern pet foods are more nutritious than the diets of these wild animals, but formulated foods do seem to encourage plaque and tartar accumulation.

In the past decade, dog and cat foods have been developed with the purpose of helping to remove plaque before it causes more serious dental problems. In order to do this, pet food researchers looked at a number of factors, including the size of the food pieces, the texture, the fiber content, and the manner in which the food breaks apart when chewed. Using these findings, they have been able to design foods that actually remove plaque and tartar as the dog or cat eats. We see definite improvement in the oral health of pets that are fed dental diets, even if it isn't their only food.

Some pet owners feed a regular maintenance food in the morning, and give a dish of the dental diet as the evening feeding. Others use individual pieces of the dental diet as treats (it tastes great!). For pets with a serious tendency toward tartar problems, the dental diet can be fed as the only food, since it is a complete and balanced diet.