

# Dental Care for Dogs and Cats

*By the Team at Simply Seaweed*

Did you know that 80% of dogs and 70% of cats have some degree of dental disease by the age of three years? It's the most common ailment affecting our pets!

Dental disease can contribute to a range of health conditions including heart, kidney, and liver disease, which can shorten the lifespan of your pet. Most dental disease occurs below the gum line where it is not visible.

Our teeth need to be regularly cleaned and maintained, and so do our pets'. Maintaining good dental hygiene is the best way to prevent dental disease and bad breath. Prevention is better than cure!

Pet dental care is not a one-size-fits-all approach, nor can any one thing get the job done. You may need to try some different approaches to find out what works best for both you and your pet.

## Signs of Dental Disease

Common signs of dental disease include bad breath and staining or build-up on teeth. The suggestions in this article can help to reduce these issues.

Advanced dental disease is often signified by pain, discomfort, swelling and/or bleeding in and around the mouth area. If your pet is experiencing any of these signs, or has any loose or rotting teeth, please consult your veterinarian.

## Risk Factors

There are many factors that can increase the likelihood of a dog or cat having dental disease. Certain breeds (such as Greyhounds, small & toy dog breeds and brachycephalic dog & cat breeds) are notorious for dental problems. Genetics, age, diet, medical conditions, and medications also come in to play amongst many other things.

## Bad Breath



*Artwork by Kate Clayton*

The medical term for bad breath is Halitosis. It is unpleasant for us as well as our pets! A common cause is dental disease, but it can also be brought on by certain medical conditions (such as tonsillitis), coprophagia (eating poop) or from licking their anus. If bad breath comes on suddenly, check (or have your vet check) your pet's mouth to see if there are sticks, bone fragments or rotting food stuck in their teeth or lodged in the back of their mouth/throat.

## Veterinary Checkups & Cleaning

Just like humans, dogs and cats also need to visit the dentist! All veterinarians are trained in basic pet dentistry, while complex issues are referred to a veterinary dental specialist.

A dental check-up should be performed once a year by your pet's veterinarian. This generally consists of a simple examination of the mouth and does not require any sedation. This may also be required by some pet insurance companies.

A dental scale and polish (known as a "Dental") may be recommended by your veterinarian – most dogs and cats require a few of these during their lifetime. During a Dental your pet will be put under a general anaesthetic. The procedure is routine, quick and safe. Dental Month in Australia is August so during this time many vet clinics have promotions on Dentals.

There are businesses offering anaesthesia-free teeth cleaning, however, this method is not recommended by the [Australian Veterinary Association](#) due to safety and efficacy concerns.

## Diet

A big part of dental care is diet.

The majority of dogs and cats are fed kibble. The dry rough surface of kibble provides good mechanical abrasion that helps to scrub away plaque and is also less likely than wet food to get stuck in gaps between teeth. [Advance](#), [Hills](#) and [Royal Canin](#) all offer a high-quality kibble range specifically developed for dental care.

Bones and chews both clean teeth and provide mental enrichment. Their hardness scrapes plaque from teeth, whilst the saliva generated from the prolonged chewing action helps to wash away food particles and neutralise acids.

It's not just dogs that eat bones, cats can have them too! Bones can either be given recreationally, or as part of your pet's regular diet. Choose a bone that is suitable for the size of your pet. Supervise pets that are new to bones or that scoff their food. Never feed your pet cooked bones (as cooked bones may splinter into shards) and remember to practise good hygiene when handling raw meat. Pet nutritionists do not recommend feeding weight bearing bones from large animals (such as beef marrow bones) as their density can result in cracked teeth.

Aside from bones, there are lots of other great products for pets to chew on, including: cow hooves, goat horns, beef hide rolls, bully sticks, shark fins/skin, a whole or half fresh coconut, carrots, [Greenies](#) and [OraVet](#).



*SkinnyDog Pet Treats Beef Hide Roll, image from <https://skinnydogpettreats.com>*

## Tooth Brushing

While brushing a dog or cat's teeth is often considered the best way of maintaining their dental hygiene, it is certainly not one of the easiest!

It is best to start training your pet to accept their teeth being brushed when they are a puppy/kitten.

There are two different types of toothbrushes available for pets – the finger brush and the “normal” style toothbrush. If you are worried about your pet accidentally (or purposely!) biting your fingers, then a normal style toothbrush is a better choice as it keeps your fingers at a greater distance from their teeth. Choosing a toothbrush with a multi-angled head will provide greater coverage across the surface areas of the teeth.

Effective alternatives to commercial finger brushes include a piece of pantyhose, gauze or flannel. You can also use your thumbnail to loosen plaque.

You don't have to use toothpaste with a toothbrush, but it will increase the efficacy. Do not use toothpastes made for humans as they may contain ingredients (such as xylitol) that are toxic to pets. They may also contain too much fluoride which can be harmful to your pet as unlike us, our pets do not spit the toothpaste out. There are lots of recipes available on the internet if you are keen to make your own toothpaste.



*Dentipet Finger Brush, image from <https://www.ceva.com.au>*



*Petosan Double-Headed Toothbrush, image from <https://petosan.com>*

## Toys

Whilst dogs are usually the one to play with toys, there is no reason that cats can't too! Any toy that encourages mouth-play will be beneficial to your pet's dental health, due to the mechanical action applied to teeth and gums.



*PetSafe Busy Buddy Bristle Bone, image from <https://www.petsafe.com>*

## Dental Products

There are many pet dental products available - food additives, water additives, sprays, wipes and gels.

Simply Seaweed is a dental supplement for dogs and cats, made of 100% certified organic *Ascophyllum nodosum*, a species of seaweed that has proven dental benefits. Simply Seaweed is an Australian ethical small business and social enterprise, where every sale supports pets in need! For more information about Simply Seaweed, or to find your nearest retailer, please visit [www.simplyseaweed.com.au](http://www.simplyseaweed.com.au).



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