

## **How To Brush Your Pet's Teeth:**

**WHY?** A thin film of protein from saliva, food and dead cells forms on your pet's teeth and gums. When this layer thickens, turning plaque, it becomes the perfect environment for bacterial growth. This plaque, along with bacteria, builds up along the gum line, leading to gingivitis and periodontitis, which may spread infection to the rest of the body. Brushing your pet's teeth can go a long way toward preventing dental disease and other problems, such as heart or kidney infection, that can result. Some pets resist brushing, but most will accept it with time.

**When Your Pet Is Very Young:** Start a routine that will prepare your pet for "real" brushing later, when he is about 3 months old. For example, teach your puppy to "come," "sit," and "stay." Use these techniques when getting ready to brush. Always approaching from the side, open his mouth and look inside. Once he has mastered this, start showing him a toothbrush - any inexpensive human brush will do - at the end of this routine. Let him sniff and lick it, but don't start brushing, yet. Don't let your dog chew on the brush - it's a bad habit to get into. Praise him abundantly for his good behavior. At this age, be sure to provide your pet with lots of safe toys to chew on. Dogs, especially, are very mouthy until their adult teeth come in at about six months of age.

**When Your Pet Is About Six Months Old:** We will get you started brushing your pet's teeth when he is about six months old, after recuperating from neutering or spaying. This is a good age to begin actual brushing, because all the adult teeth should be in by now and the mouth should no longer be tender.

- Use pet toothpaste, flavored to your pet's preference. Human pastes contain fluoride that may be toxic if ingested.
- Place a small amount (pea-sized) of toothpaste on your finger and offer it to your pet as a reward at the end of the "brushing" routine. This will help him to realize that tooth brushing is fun and rewarding. Continue this for about one week.
- Start presenting him with the toothpaste on a finger brush. Gently begin brushing his teeth for about 10-15 seconds on each side. Concentrate on the outside surfaces of the cheek teeth, specifically the carnassial (fourth premolar) teeth.
- In a few weeks or so, introduce the toothpaste on a pet toothbrush, and begin "real" brushing. We offer dog and cat brushes. Some cats and small dogs do better with the finger brush - that's OK. The important thing is to brush.
- Position the brush bristles at a 45 degree angle to the teeth. Make small circular strokes at the gum line, while rotating the brush outward to remove debris. Eight to ten strokes are sufficient for each area. Concentrate on the outside surfaces of the teeth first, as this is where the most tartar accumulates.
- To brush the inner surfaces of the teeth, try inserting a toy into the front of the pet's mouth to hold it open while you brush, or have a helper open the mouth.
- Always offer a reward when through, for example, a Dental Reward™, a walk, or playtime.
- Small dogs and cats may prefer to sit on your lap while you, or an assistant, brush their teeth.