

## How Important is Brushing Your Dog's Teeth?

by Tara Lynne Brown



### It's bedtime. Don't forget to brush Rover's teeth before he goes to sleep!

Keeping your dog's smile sparkling and white won't just score him or her more dates at the dog park, but a potentially longer life with you. Just like a human, a dog's dental health affects the health of their entire body. The visible plaque and tartar you see in your dog's smile is buildup of serious, damaging bacteria. To the common eye it may look harmless, just an off-white smile on the outside, but inside is where more severe compromise can occur. Poor dental care results in significant bacteria buildup around the gum line, causing it to decay and bleed. Dogs' hearts, livers and kidneys are at a high risk of being damaged by these threatening bacteria through simple access to the bloodstream created by the deteriorated gum line.

You may have thought simple cavities would be a concern? "Dogs don't generally get cavities," said Dr. Jennifer Suter, a general practitioner veterinarian with a heavy background in dentistry and internal medicine at Preston Animal Hospital in Morrisville, North Carolina. "Cavities do happen, but truthfully they are very rare."

Dogs are not naturally resistant to dental disease. Considering the long term cost of canine cardiac care or dialysis and the pain your dog may experience, it's an effortless decision to invest less than ten dollars in a toothbrush and toothpaste made for dogs. Spending a few minutes three to four days per week (daily is even better!) to brush your dog's teeth will not only save you money in veterinary bills, but buy a longer and pain-free life for your companion.


A more effective investment is a professional cleaning performed by your veterinarian, which can cost approximately \$275 (keep in mind anesthesia is required and included in this approximation). Some pet insurance companies, like Pets Best Insurance, cover the cost of an annual dental cleaning with your pet policy.

Most dog owners are lax about brushing their dog's teeth and don't realize how effective this

inexpensive preventative action is for their pet's health. Statistics are getting better, but currently about 30% of dog owners routinely brush their dog's teeth, according to Dr. Suter. She shared, "The goals with dental cleanings for dogs are one, not to have a painful mouth, and two, to keep every tooth."

If you want to start brushing your dog's teeth right away, don't run to your bathroom just yet. The toothpaste we use is specifically designed for humans' dental needs. The clear warning on toothpaste containers that reads "do not swallow" should be heeded with respect to your dog as well. Dogs do not have the ability to brush, rinse and spit, so they require a canine formula that is safe to ingest. Dog toothpastes are created with ingredients like sorbitol and cellulose gum that safely break down into sugar compounds if ingested. Canine toothpaste also differs from human formulas by taste. Most revolve around a dog's favorites flavors: beef and chicken.

All dog owners should acquaint their dogs with routine brushing, but owners of toy breeds should take their pet's dental health even more seriously. Dr. Suter advises that owners of Maltese, Dachsunds, Poodles and Yorkies are at an especially higher risk for dental complications. "A lot of hair around the muzzle means chronically having saliva sitting in the hair, food particles stuck in the hair and resting in the teeth," Dr. Suter said.

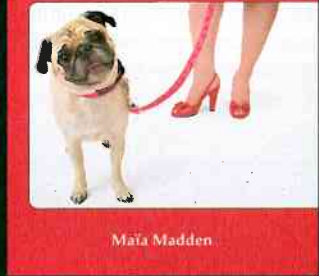
Your dog is a member of your family. You may dress up your dog in fashionable clothes and bring him or her with you to lunch at an outdoor café. When you take time to brush your own teeth, think about Rover's too. We all want our loved ones to live long and healthy. Brushing and professional prophylactic cleanings by your veterinarian will keep your dog healthy and extend your pet's life, ensuring more hot dates at the dog park! 

Tara Lynne Brown is a freelance writer in the Triangle-area of North Carolina and proud owner of an Australian Shepherd-mix who loves having his teeth brushed every evening. Visit her website at [www.taralynnebrown.com](http://www.taralynnebrown.com).

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