

# Dental Health in Dogs

Catching a whiff of your dog's bad breath is never nice and that unforgettable 'dog breath' smell isn't normal.

Often an indication of dental disease, bad breath is just one sign that we should be looking out for, but the good news is so much can be done to help prevent and treat oral health problems.



## Dental disease – a big problem

In short, good dental care is as important for the overall health of your dog as it is for us humans and yet 85% of dogs have dental problems by the age of just three years<sup>1,2</sup>. Dental disease is not just an old dog problem; some dogs have periodontal disease, (a serious, often irreversible, bacterial infection of the gums), as young as just 22 months<sup>3</sup>. Imagine how awful it would be if 85% of young children had the same problem!



## Lift the Lip!

Part of the problem for our beloved dogs is that dental disease is an unseen disease; this is because we seldom look inside their mouths. It can mean dental issues go unnoticed and undiagnosed simply because we don't know what we're not seeing.



Getting into the habit of looking inside your dog's mouth or 'lifting the lip' every day, can help you identify the dental issues which develop slowly but steadily inside your dog's mouth. And although some dogs might not like having their mouth handled at first, doing this positively with a healthy treat and a kind soothing voice is much kinder than waiting for obvious signs of discomfort such as mouth pawing and not eating.

## Signs of dental disease

Talking of signs - it's surprising how well dogs can mask the painful signs of dental disease. Many dogs even learn how to eat dry food with the non-painful part of their mouth, (another reason why many owners miss the early signs of dental disease), however here are some signs to look for:

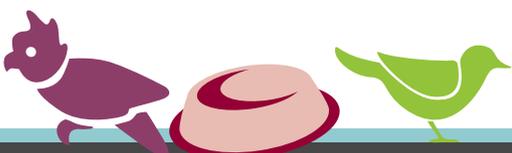
- Bad breath
- Sore mouth
- Difficulty eating
- Loose teeth or tooth loss
- Dribbling
- Bleeding gums
- Pawing or rubbing the mouth
- Yellow or brown tartar on the teeth

Some dogs will express their pain in certain ways too;

- Out of character aggression
- Objection to their mouth being handled
- Lethargy
- Becoming less social



<sup>1</sup> Wiggs RB. Periodontal disease in age categories of dogs and cats. Proc 11th Annual Veterinary Dental Forum, Denver CO 1997  
<sup>2</sup> Niemiec BA. Periodontal Disease and Therapy. Proc BSAVA 2005  
<sup>3</sup> Eisner ER. Home care and dietary management of canine and feline dental patients, in Proceedings/Vet Dental Forum 2001:35-39.



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## What to do if you spot a problem

Dental disease can be helped, take your dog to your vet for a complete oral health check-up and they will advise on the best treatment. If a problem needs medication and/or surgery try not to worry. After treatment many dogs become “different, happier dogs” because they no longer have pain.

Even if your dog isn't showing signs of oral health problems, it's worth asking your vet for a dental check-up anyway. **Prevention is always better than cure.**

After your vet has completed any dental treatment it's surprisingly easy to keep your dog's teeth and gums clean and healthy by following the 3D's of Dental Care

1

Daily Brushing

2

Dental Check

3

Dental Diet and Chews



1

**Daily Brushing:** Tooth brushing is the most effective way to remove plaque from the gumline<sup>2</sup> and is often referred to as the gold standard of dental hygiene. Here are a few tips to help:

### TIPS FOR DAILY TOOTH BRUSHING

**Keep sessions short** – 3 minutes is plenty.

**A little goes a long way:** Use three pea-sized blobs of dog toothpaste – one each for the left, right and front of the mouth.

**Be patient:** You can train any dog at any age but you do need to be patient.

**Baby steps:** Introduce tooth brushing without actually brushing the teeth. Let your dog lick the toothpaste and place a little bit on one or two teeth to get your dog used to having his mouth handled. Repeat two or three times. This is a crucial part of this process and can take weeks to get right.

**You'll need:** A pet toothbrush with soft bristles, a quiet area with few or no distractions and plenty of patience. You can start with a finger toothbrush or cotton buds.

**Use dog toothpaste:** These are designed for and to taste good to dogs but if your dog doesn't like them then water is fine. Please note human toothpaste contains fluoride, which is toxic to dogs because they cannot spit it out.

**Start at the back:** Always start at the back of the mouth and work forward. The front teeth are sensitive, and many dogs don't like them being touched - it can tickle.

**Slowly do it:** Gradually build-up the amount of time you spend brushing until you reach two to three minutes.

**Focus on the gum margins:** This is where bacteria accumulate

**Reward:** Always give a reward during and when you're finished

2

**Dental Check:** Take your dog to your local veterinary practice for a dental check once every 6-12 months.

Certain breeds like the Yorkshire Terrier or those pets with a history of dental disease are advised to go for a dental examination once every 6 months.

Small dogs are more likely to have overcrowded or misaligned teeth which are more difficult to keep clean, making them more prone to dental disease.

Larger dogs or those without a history of dental problems can go for a check-up once a year.

3

**Dental Diet and Chews:** There is a whole range of dental diets and chews on the market and because eating/chewing is something dogs do every single day it makes sense to utilise those with proven dental benefits. Examples include certain pet foods, flexible rubber chew toys and dental chews.

Although many products are available and can work very well, they are never as effective as daily tooth brushing.

And finally, remember that dental disease isn't just about bad dog breath. Simply taking care of your dog's teeth everyday will do more than just freshen their breath; it could improve your dog's quality of life too.

More advice on dental health  
can be found at: [www.pfma.org.uk/fact-sheets](http://www.pfma.org.uk/fact-sheets)

