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Dental Cleaning in Dogs

When rough tartar accumulates on tooth surfaces and touches the gum line, it is time for a professional oral assessment, treatment, and prevention visit.

What is involved with a dental exam?

An examination by your veterinarian is the first step. Your veterinarian will confirm that a dental cleaning is needed and will review with you what procedures are likely required prior to the dental cleaning.

Your veterinarian may perform preanesthetic blood tests to ensure that kidney and liver function are satisfactory for anesthesia (see handout "Preanesthetic Bloodwork" for more information), as well as an evaluation of the heart and abdomen, if needed. Anesthesia is important to allow a tooth-by-tooth examination, including dental X-rays.



What happens during a professional dental cleaning visit for my dog?

A dental cleaning visit will include a thorough dental examination, teeth cleaning, and polishing to remove tartar and plaque that causes periodontal disease. This is done while your dog is under general anesthesia.

Once anesthetized, your veterinarian, with the help of veterinary assistants, will thoroughly examine the mouth, noting abnormalities in the medical record. A dental probe will be used to evaluate gum bleeding and identify periodontal pockets where food can accumulate and decay can occur, if not properly cared for.

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When periodontal disease is advanced, the affected teeth may need to be extracted, either during the procedure or at a later time. Your dog's required treatment will be discussed with you after the cleaning, once the gums and each tooth have been checked.

Since it can be difficult to predict the extent of dental disease before the procedure, it is imperative that your veterinarian is able to reach you during the procedure to discuss any additional treatment that may be necessary.

How are my dog's teeth cleaned?

After a thorough examination of your dog's mouth, tooth scaling will be performed, using both hand and ultrasonic scalers, to remove plaque and tartar above and below the gum line. The tartar below the gum line causes the most significant periodontal disease, so its removal is important.

After scaling, the teeth are polished to remove microscopic scratches and decrease the rate of subsequent plaque build-up. Sealer application may be recommended to decrease plaque accumulation.



Why can't plaque and tartar be removed with a human dental scaler?

Although you can remove some of the accumulated plaque and tartar above the gum line in dogs that are cooperative, there are problems with doing this:

- Only the visible tartar above the gum line is removed. This leaves the plaque and tartar below the gum line which will continue to cause periodontal problems.
- It is neither possible nor safe to clean the inner surfaces of the teeth properly in a conscious dog.
- The use of any instrument on the tooth enamel will cause microscopic scratches on the surface which will ultimately damage the tooth surface, leading to further disease – this is the reason your dental hygienist always polishes your teeth after removing tartar with dental instruments.
- If your dog moves suddenly, the sharp instrument may cut the gums, causing pain and bleeding.

Do I have to make an appointment for my dog to have a dental scaling and polishing?

Yes. Your veterinarian will perform preanesthetic tests and examine for underlying disorders prior to the procedure.

How can I prevent tartar accumulation after the procedure?

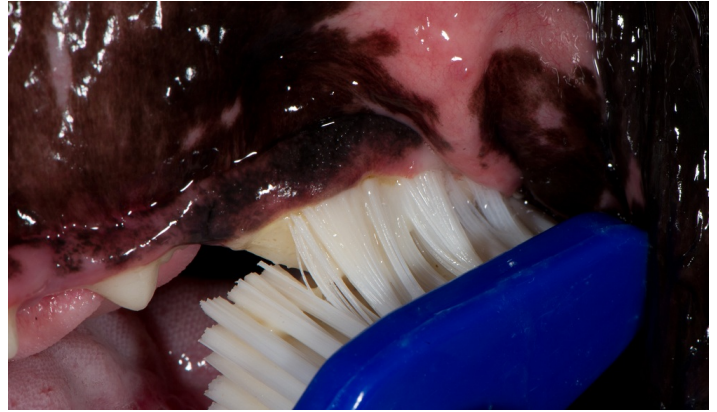
Plaque forms in as little as six hours after your dog's dental cleaning. A home dental care program including regular tooth brushing is a must. Your veterinarian will provide you with detailed instructions on how to brush or rinse your dog's teeth. See handout "Plaque and Tartar Prevention in Dogs" for further information.

The Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) only accepts dental products and diets that are safe and proven to reduce the accumulation of plaque and tartar based on strict scientific studies. A list of accepted products can be viewed at www.VOHC.org and your veterinarian can advise you as well.

Can I use human toothpaste?

Absolutely not. Human dentifrice or toothpaste should never be used in dogs. Human teeth cleaning detergents contain ingredients that are not intended to be swallowed and can cause internal problems if they are swallowed. Human products also commonly contain higher levels of salt which can be a problem for some dogs.

You should also avoid using baking soda to clean your dog's teeth. Baking soda has a high alkaline content and, if swallowed, it can upset the acid balance in the stomach and digestive tract.



Why is pet toothpaste recommended?

Pet toothpastes are non-foaming, safe to be swallowed, and are available in flavors that are appealing to dogs including poultry, beef, malt, and mint. If you use a product that tastes good, your dog will be more likely to enjoy the whole experience.

In addition to the pleasant taste, many of these toothpastes contain enzymes that are designed to help break down plaque chemically, which reduces the time you need to spend brushing your dog's teeth.

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