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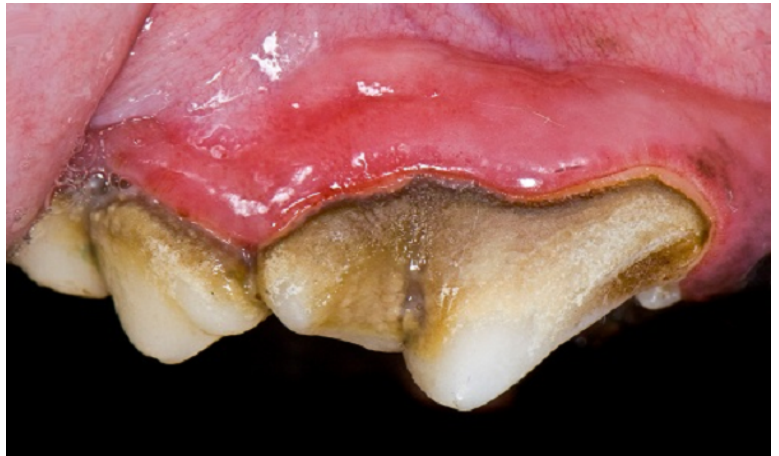
Website: <https://scottveterinaryclinic.vet/>

## Plaque and Tartar Prevention in Dogs

### How do plaque and tartar form, and what do they do?

Plaque is a gummy substance that forms on the teeth within a few hours after a meal. Within 24 hours, plaque begins to harden by combining with salts that are present in the saliva. As the plaque continues to accumulate and mineralize, it eventually transforms into tartar. Tartar, also called calculus, is rough and porous and can develop above and below the gum line.

There are two ways that tartar harms the teeth and gums.



First, tartar forms a rough surface that serves as a place for bacteria to grow and multiply in the mouth. Bacteria can cause inflammation of the gums (gingivitis), which often results in painful bleeding. Gingivitis often progresses to periodontal disease, which leads to further inflammation, pain, and tooth loss (see handout "Dental Disease in Dogs" for further information). As tartar builds up along the gum line, it pushes the gums away from the roots of the teeth. As the gums recede, they expose the sensitive, enamel-free part of the tooth which causes sensitivity and pain.

Second, the bacteria on the tartar can be absorbed into the blood stream and deposited in various organs, including the liver and the kidneys, causing infection and decreased organ function.

## How can I prevent plaque and tartar formation on my dog's teeth?

After your dog's teeth have been professionally cleaned and polished by your veterinarian, home dental care is needed to help reduce plaque and tartar buildup. You can decrease plaque accumulation by undertaking the following activities:

- Feeding your dog a dental diet accepted by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC), which slows plaque and tartar accumulation by mechanical or chemical means. By limiting plaque as it forms, tartar development is greatly reduced.
- Brushing or wiping your dog's teeth daily. This is one of the most effective ways to remove plaque before it turns into tartar. Do not use human toothpaste as it contains ingredients that can cause an upset stomach when swallowed.
- Using a VOHC-accepted water additive to reduce the bacterial count in the mouth, resulting in improved breath.
- Offering your dog chew toys and dental treats that are specifically designed to help reduce or remove mild tartar. Never let dogs chew on bones, horse hoofs, antlers, ice cubes, or nylon toys, which may break teeth.
- Having your veterinarian perform a dental cleaning under general anesthesia every 6–12 months at the first sign of tartar buildup. Regular dental cleaning is as important in dogs as in people, and will go a long way to prevent irreversible damage to the gums and roots.

## How do I know if the product I'm using to prevent tartar is actually working?

The Veterinary Oral Health Council only accepts dental products that are safe and proven to reduce the accumulation of plaque and tartar based on strict scientific studies. View the VOHC website for a list of accepted products: [www.VOHC.org](http://www.VOHC.org).



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