



ASK THE EXPERT: CANINE DENTAL HEALTH

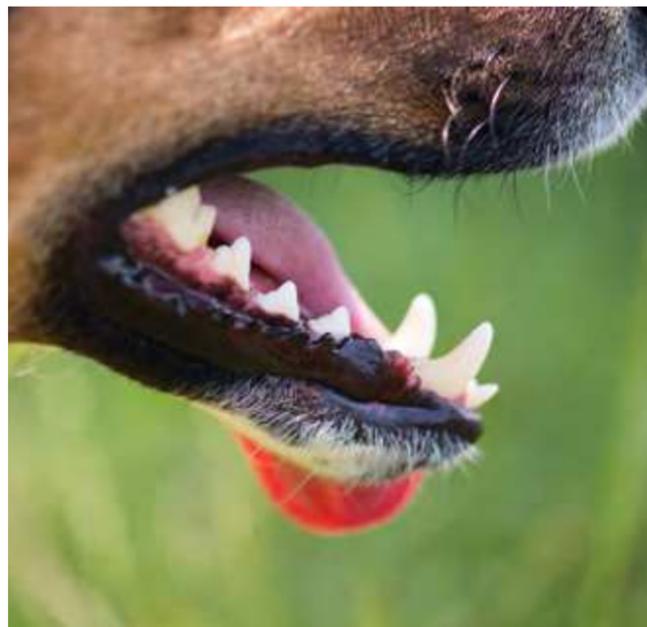
We've all heard that a dog's mouth is cleaner than a human's. And while it's true that dogs are less prone to cavities than their two-legged family members, they too can develop a range of other dental problems, including tartar and plaque build-up, gingivitis, bad breath and more.

Why it's important

It's quite common for a dog's dental health to go ignored by owners. In fact, some studies have shown that around 80% of dogs suffer with some form of periodontal disease. This not only has a negative effect on the health of your dog's teeth and gums, but bacteria from the condition can release toxins which enter your dog's blood stream and affect its kidneys, liver and heart. A proper dental routine limits these problems and can actually contribute to your dog living a longer, healthier life.

Symptoms

Be on the lookout for bad breath as this is a major sign that something could be wrong in your dog's mouth. Other symptoms to keep an eye out for include excessive drooling, pawing at the mouth, a change in chewing habits, discoloured, broken or missing teeth, and bleeding or swollen gums.



Brushing teeth

Much like a daily walk or grooming, brushing your dog's teeth should be a regular occurrence. Most experts recommend doing it daily, but three to four times a week should suffice if you are short on time.

Ideally you should introduce brushing when your dog is still a puppy as it will be more inclined to allow you to poke around its mouth. Older dogs will take some time to get used to the idea, but can be trained with treats after brushing, and by using a reassuring voice and touch during the process.

Remember, it is vital that you only use dog toothpaste (which can be found at good pet stores) for brushing your pooch's teeth, as most human toothpastes contain fluoride, which is highly poisonous to dogs.

Food & chew toys

If brushing your dog's teeth proves to be a mission, there are other ways to ensure their teeth remain healthy. For one, you can swap soft dog food for dry, crunchy food and treats, as these are less likely to remain in between teeth and result in decay. You can also opt for sturdier chew toys as prolonged chewing can help scrape away plaque from teeth and strengthen gums. Always go for rubber or nylon artificial toys.

To keep teeth strong from the inside, it is worth investing in a good quality dog food. Make sure it contains calcium, as this mineral is vital for keeping teeth strong.



Vet visits

Dogs will benefit from having their teeth checked by a vet every 6-12 months. If your vet does not perform a dental examination with your dog's regular check-up, be sure to insist on one as this could identify any problems before they become too serious. Your vet will also be able to professionally clean your dog's teeth. This is done under anaesthesia and involves x-rays being taken to identify any hidden problems, cleaning below the gum line and scraping away plaque and tartar from teeth. It is recommended to have your dog's teeth professionally cleaned at least once a year, starting from when it is 6 months old.



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