

Protect your puppy's pearly whites

Dental health is a fundamental part of your furry best friend's future. Use this handout to start good habits in puppyhood that carry over into adulthood.

Twenty-eight: That's the number of teeth in your puppy's mouth, and each of these teeth is vitally important to your puppy's daily activities and overall health. As with your own teeth, neglected puppy teeth can collect plaque and tartar that can lead to periodontal disease and even tooth loss—a fact that becomes even more important when those 28 puppy teeth are replaced with 42 permanent adult teeth.

But if you start training your puppy now, you can teach him to tolerate (and even like) tooth brushing as a puppy and as an adult.

Brush up on your toothbrush options

You have lots of options when it comes to choosing a toothbrush for your puppy—from brushes that look like your own toothbrush (make sure you can tell the difference!) to a soft, rubbery brush that fits over your finger. Choose a brush made specifically for dogs that can safely and comfortably fit in your puppy's mouth. Ask your veterinary team to help you pick the best brush for the job.

Don't use the force

Teach your puppy that his toothbrush is super cool and that when it comes out, great things happen (like treats!).

Slowly introduce the brush into your puppy's mouth. As long as your puppy is still comfortable, move forward. But if your puppy withdraws from your touch, go back to the last step where he was happy. Never use force—it will teach your puppy to hate the toothbrush.

It's very unlikely that you'll brush all 28 teeth on the first try, and that's OK. Patiently move up to longer brushing periods over time, and keep it positive with encouragement and rewards as he improves. The goal is to brush daily because the plaque can harden into tartar in as fast as 36 hours. Brush it off every 24 hours to make the most impact.

Visual aids

We tried out some toothbrush tips on a very cute 11-month-old Dalmatian and took pictures to show it can be done! Check out dvm360.com/dalmatiandental.

Pick a paste

You can also choose a pet toothpaste. (Don't use ones meant for people!) These products can help make the experience fun for your puppy because they come in different flavors, like chicken and peanut butter. Ask your veterinary team for a recommendation.

One last tip ...

If you keep the toothbrush in a drawer or container, store other goodies there too so your puppy can learn that opening that drawer always means good things. Then, the toothbrush becomes just another one of the fun things you do together.

