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The effort you take to care for your cat or dog's pearly whites can bring great rewards. By taking time to consistently check Fluffy or Fido's teeth and gums and following a regular dental routine, you both will be able to enjoy life together to the fullest! The following tips will help you keep your kitty or doggie's teeth, mouth and gums in "pawsome" condition:

Take a whiff. To get a sense of your pet's current dental health, begin with a quick breath check. While a little odor is normal for both dogs and cats, it is more of a cause for concern if it is especially offensive and a trip to the vet may be advisable. With felines, this may indicate digestive problems or a possible gum disease such as gingivitis and merits a checkup.

Gumming it up. Sneak a peak at your pet's teeth and gums. To check your cat's chompers, as Kitty faces you, gently push back its lips and peer inside. The gums should be firm, have no signs of swelling, be pink rather than white or red, and teeth should be clean, free of any brownish tartar, and intact, with none loose or broken. The best way to check your pooch's pearly whites is to have him face you, lift his lips, and examine his mouth. His gums should exhibit no swelling, should be pink, not red or white, and his teeth should be clean, free and clear of any brown-colored tartar. For dogs, it's recommended you make this dental checkup a weekly habit.

Heed the signs. Part of responsible pet care is recognizing the symptoms that may indicate a potential health concern. With our feline friends, issues include a dark red line along the gum line, ulcers on the tongue or gums, loose teeth, pus, difficulty chewing food, and excessive drooling or pawing at the mouth area. For Rover, watch for cysts under the tongue, excessive drooling, inflamed gums, loose teeth or tumors in the gums. If Fluffy or Fido exhibits any of these traits, it is advisable to take him in for a veterinary exam.

"Purr-fect" teeth, every time. Polish your cat's teeth to a healthy shine by using cotton swabs, a tiny toothbrush designed for cats, and a toothpaste* specially formulated for felines, which are available in yummy flavors such as tuna or poultry. To get Kitty acclimated to a brushing routine, begin by just massaging her gums with your finger or touching them with a cotton swab. After a few sessions, rub a dab of paste over your cat's lips to get her used to the taste. Gradually, you can introduce the toothbrush with paste, taking care to gently brush the teeth.

"Ruff" and ready tooth care. Plenty of choices for doggie dental care are available, including water additives, dental gels, and the dynamic duo of toothbrush and paste. To brush your pup's teeth, you'll need a clean piece of gauze wrapped around your finger, a toothbrush designed for canines, or even one that fits on your finger, a great option for petite pups. For toothpaste*, select one that is made just for dogs or make a paste out of baking soda and water; however, if your pooch is under six months, steer clear of fluoride, as it can harm their stomachs. If you want to go "full dog," opt for canine mouthwash from your vet. Get Rover ready for a brushing routine by rubbing his gums with a cotton swab or your finger for 30 to 60 seconds once or twice a day for a few weeks. When your dog is comfortable with this procedure, put a little bit of toothpaste on your finger and rub it over Rex's teeth. Next, introduce the toothbrush with a small amount of toothpaste and gently brush away.

Chewy, yet satisfying. Nibbling on toys can satisfy Fluffy or Fido's natural instincts to gnaw and has the added benefit of strengthening your pet's teeth; however, it's best to avoid giving your furry friend any playthings that are harder than its teeth. Your feline companion may enjoy dental care chews, which will help with Kitty's breath and oral hygiene.



Food for thought. What your pet eats can have a positive impact on its oral hygiene. Cats generally do best on a diet primarily of canned food but, by including some dry kibble in your feline's food regimen, you can help keep its teeth clean and sharp. For the same reason, a dry kibble diet works well for dogs. If you prefer giving your canine companion wet food, supplementing with dry biscuits can help eliminate excess plaque and tartar.

By following these tips, not only can your furry friend enjoy greater overall health, but your pet can also have a smile that is simply "pawsome!"

*Toothpaste for human use is never appropriate for pets.

The advice provided in these articles is general in nature, and may need to be adapted for your specific situation. Always consult your veterinarian.

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