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BRUSHING YOUR CAT'S TEETH

Teaching your cat to accept the brushing of its teeth will take some training, but will be very beneficial once he is accustomed to the process. Daily brushing is most beneficial and will help to establish a routine for your pet. Brushing twice a week is acceptable if your schedule can't accommodate daily brushing.

It is best to teach your cat to accept brushing while he or she is still a kitten. If you have an older cat, the process may take a little longer.

- Choose a quiet time and place to start the brushing.
- Hold your cat securely in your lap.
- Start by rubbing your finger or a soft cloth over the cat's teeth in a back-and-forth motion. Be careful to stay on the outside surfaces of the teeth to avoid being bitten by accident.



Once the cat is comfortable with this, let him or her taste a little bit of toothpaste from your finger. Pet toothpaste is recommended for several reasons. The flavor is very appetizing to most cats and may make brushing more enjoyable for them. Pet toothpastes often clean the teeth enzymatically, thereby reducing the amount of actual abrasive brushing that you must perform. Human toothpaste should not be used as it can result in your cat having an upset stomach and may contain higher levels of sodium than your cat needs.

Once the cat has accepted the taste of the toothpaste, apply a small amount to a toothbrush and begin by placing your free hand over your cat's head with your thumb and index finger on opposite sides of your cat's upper jaw. Gently raise your cat's lip on one side and begin by brushing one or two cheek teeth. A finger-brush toothbrush works well for most cats. This type of toothbrush should be placed right along the gum-line and used in a circular motion. Start from the back and work toward the midline of the jaw. In order to brush the lower teeth, you will need to open your cat's mouth just a little. This can be done by gently tilting your cat's head backward while holding onto his or her upper jaw with the thumb and index finger of your free hand.

Do not worry about brushing the tops or insides of the teeth unless your cat is very compliant. Most of the periodontal lesions occur on the outer surfaces of the teeth and this is where you should direct your efforts. The tongue tends to remove plaque from the inner surfaces of the teeth reducing the need for brushing these surfaces. Gradually work up to brushing all of the teeth (this will probably take several days or weeks). Make sure you reach the big teeth at the back of the mouth.

Try to brush for approximately 30 seconds per side.

Remember - A cat's mouth contains plenty of harmful bacteria, so it is a good idea to wash your hands and the toothbrush thoroughly when you are done.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM
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