



# Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital

## GUIDE TO CLEANING YOUR CAT'S TEETH

Dental disease is a very common problem in cats, with around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of pet cats over the age of 3 years, suffering from some degree of dental disease.

Plaque is a complex film of bacteria that develops on the surface of teeth, and if left undisturbed, it will harden and calcify, developing into tartar or calculus. Once tartar has formed, it can only be removed by dental scaling performed under a general anaesthetic.

Dental disease can cause severe pain and reduced quality of life, with research proving that the presence of bacteria and toxins in the mouth can migrate via the bloodstream affecting vital organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys.

### TOOTH BRUSHING:

- Tooth brushing is the “gold standard” of dental homecare, being the single most effective way to reduce plaque.
- Tooth brushing can be started at any age, but the younger the cat is, the easier to adapt to the routine.
- A suitable toothbrush for cats should be used (*has a smaller head with softer bristles*), along with a specific pet toothpaste. Human toothpastes should NEVER be used as they contain fluoride and foaming agents which will be unpleasant for your cat and may cause harm if swallowed. Pet toothpastes are usually flavoured (*chicken / beef / fish etc.*) to increase palatability and encourage compliance.
- Brushing should be carried out on a daily basis to be effective – anything less is not sufficient to keep plaque under control.
- For the first few days, introduce the toothpaste by placing a little onto your cat's nose for them to lick off, or offer it from your finger.
- Familiarise yourself with how to hold your cat's head when brushing. It is usually easier to hold the head from behind to prevent the cat from reversing, and is less confrontational. Place your palm over the top of the cat's head and use your thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> finger to raise the top lip whilst gently tilting the head upwards a little.
- Next, apply some toothpaste to a cotton bud and gently rub the teeth in a circular motion. Start at the back teeth as these are most difficult to reach, but most important to brush and work your way forward.
- Continue this process little and often over the next few days, then introduce the toothbrush following the above procedure.
- Start with just a few seconds brushing each side and gradually increase this time.
- You may see a little gum bleeding initially, but this should settle as the gums become healthier.
- Remember, tooth brushing should not be a battle with your cat - take it slowly and give your cat praise and rewards to associate the process with a pleasurable experience.
- You may also find wrapping wriggly cats in a towel or blanket may help them feel more secure.

Some cats will just not tolerate tooth brushing, so an alternative home care product may be useful to help slow down plaque and tartar formation. Alternative products include: *specialty formulated dental diets / dental chews / dental rinses.*

Dental home care is an important aspect of routine preventative healthcare for all cats.

A video demonstrating cat tooth brushing can be found at:  
[icatcare.org/advice/how-to-brush-your-cats-teeth/](https://icatcare.org/advice/how-to-brush-your-cats-teeth/)

