

Brushing Teeth



Some dogs keep their teeth relatively clean through diet, but there really is nothing that can replace brushing your dog's teeth. With regular brushing, you will save your dog from painful tooth decay, and you can avoid expensive vet bills for extractions, as your dog grows older.

You will need:

- 1) Buckets of patience, perhaps also some calming music for the dog lover's soul. This should be a relaxing bonding exercise for both of you!
- 2) Good eyesight.
- 3) Super-yummy treats.
- 4) Several soft children's toothbrushes, or for a small dog, a finger brush.
- 5) Good quality canine toothpaste (choose one without aspartame), and in the beginning perhaps also some yummy peanut butter, liver paté or other soft treat (instead of toothpaste).
- 6) Your curious and hungry dog.



The Golden Rule for all grooming and handling, including brushing teeth, is:

NEVER FORCE OR RESTRAIN

If you do, you will break your dog's trust, and your dog will be even more reluctant next time you try.

How to Teach Your Dog to Love Having His or Her Teeth Brushed

Sit down with your dog in a comfortable place. Play some calming music in the background.

1. Desensitize and countercondition (DS&CC) your dog to the toothbrush:
Squish as much toothpaste or yummy paté into the toothbrush and offer the loaded toothbrush to your dog to lick or chew. Your dog may chew off the contents of the brush with his incisors (front teeth) or pre-molars. Do not, however, let your dog chew the toothbrush with his large molars (back teeth) as that can break the toothbrush. This will be your dog's daily toothbrushing exercise until the exercise under #2 has been completed.
2. DS&CC your dog to your "handling hand", ie. the hand that will support your dog's face and hold up his lips during the brushing process:
 - A) Hold five high value treats in your treat hand behind your back with your treat hand.
 - B) Reach your "handling hand" out towards the side of your dog's face, but stop BEFORE your dog turns away from the hand and hold it still there.
 - C) Immediately give one of the treats from behind your back to your dog's mouth, while your handling hand remains still.
 - D) Remove both hands from your dog at the same time.
 - E) Repeat until all five treats are gone from your treat hand.
 - F) Take a break, then repeat another two sets of five treats.
 - G) Repeat this exercise two to three times a day. Gradually work your "handling hand" closer to your dog's face, one inch at a time, but only progress when your dog is totally relaxed about your hand's approach. NEVER FORCE - if you do, you break the trust. Your dog needs to be

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able to trust that you will let him avoid *at any time* and you must then stop what you are doing. Aim towards your dog's chin, eventually sliding it under and support your dog's chin.

3. It is now time to combine the toothbrush and the "handling hand".
 - A) Place a stash of yummy treats within reach on a table or a countertop.
 - B) Hold the loaded toothbrush behind your back.
 - C) Offer your "handling hand" to your dog to put his chin into.
 - D) Offer the toothbrush from behind your back for your dog to lick or chew.
 - E) Before your dog finishes licking or chewing the toothbrush clean, remove the toothbrush and your "handling hand" (at the same time) and give your dog five yummy treats from the stash on the counter.
4. Repeat the exercise under #3 two to three times a day. Gradually work your "handling hand" from under your dog's chin to above his muzzle, one-quarter inch at a time, but only progress when your dog is totally relaxed about your hand's movement. NEVER FORCE - if you do, you break the trust. Your dog needs to be able to trust that you will let him avoid *at any time* and you must then stop what you are doing.
5. Once your dog is comfortable with your resting on top of his muzzle while he is licking the toothbrush, start touching his lips, and then move on to lifting his lips. As before, progress only when your dog is totally relaxed about your hand's movement and never force. You MUST stop whenever your dog pulls away. (But hey, that's the end of the exercise, so hey, that's also the end of the treats.)
6. Finally, when your dog is totally comfortable with your hand lifting his lips while he is licking or chewing the toothbrush, your can start a few gentle brushing strokes against your dog's canine teeth. It is usually easier to start with the canine teeth, and you can the progress to the molars, premolars, and finally the incisors.



Bonnie refuses to go to bed until I have brushed her teeth!

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