



Something to Chew On: Pet Dental Care Tips

You don't have to buy a cake and balloons to celebrate National Pet Dental month in February. Just make a decision to care for your pet's teeth.

Dr. Nicole Weber of the Pipestone Vet Clinic treats lots of animals for dental diseases. The problems, she explains, are more than cosmetic. Doggie breath signals issues that can shorten your pet's life. "Tartar on teeth is composed of bacteria. A mouthful of bacteria can lead to more serious problems—heart disease and kidney disease."

Home care is a good start, says Dr. Weber, and something more pet owners should be determined to accomplish. If you haven't been giving your pet routine teeth cleanings, though, you may notice a lot of brown tartar. That calls for an office visit.

What to expect in the vet's office

Severe tartar accumulations respond to dental prophylaxis (cleaning), which can be done in a day. Bring your pet to the Clinic in the morning and it will be ready to go home that afternoon. "We use an ultrasonic scaler to remove debris," Dr. Weber says. "Then, once teeth are clean, we polish teeth to smooth the microscopic grooves where bacteria accumulate. We'll also remove any diseased teeth to prevent pain and tooth-root abscesses."

Once your pet returns home from a dental visit you'll want to establish a tooth-care routine. Here are some tips:

- Brush or wipe your pet's teeth regularly—at least three times a week.
- Don't use your own toothpaste because it isn't made to be swallowed. Purchase toothpaste formulated for cats or dogs.
- A specifically designed pet toothbrush is more effective at reaching all teeth than one made to fit human mouths.
- Offer your pet teeth-cleaning toys or chew ropes. A well-formulated dental chew can reduce plaque by up to 69%.