



## DOGGIE DENTAL CARE

### *Not just for celebrity pets*

We know it might sound ridiculous to consider brushing your dog's teeth, after all, dogs are descendants of wolves, primal hunters, who for generations got along just fine without paying special attention to their incisors. But did you know that the mouth is a direct pathway to the lungs, kidney, liver and heart? By allowing bacteria to fester in your pet's mouth, you may be subjecting them to disease? To protect the health of your dog, you must provide frequent dental care.

Below are some pointers to get the job done without losing your hand.

#### **The Anatomy of a Dog's Mouth**

You know that dogs eat all kinds of junk — rotten leaves, old shoes and cow poop and amazingly enough, they don't get cavities. That's because the cone shape of their teeth, the non-acidic saliva produced, and their low carbohydrate diets all protect them. However, they do suffer from plaque build-up, which causes periodontal disease and ultimately tooth loss.

Plaque, is a soft, clear or cream coloured deposit that forms on teeth and below the gum line after eating. It becomes tartar when minerals in the animal's saliva interact with it. This tartar must be scraped away or it serves as a petri dish for bacteria. Bacteria are bad news because they can travel down the throat and throughout dog's body system, attacking vital organs. Meanwhile, the dog's gums can become inflamed, infected and painful. They might bleed and tooth loss can follow.

#### **Arresting Plaque**

There are three ways to eliminate tartar:

- Give your dog knobby chews and rawhide bones to play with that rub the substance off his teeth without him knowing it. (But always under supervision)

- Feed him crunchy kibble versus canned food (or a blend thereof), as well as nubby dog treats to dislodge plaque
- Brush his teeth. (Or pay to let your vet do it.)

#### **How to Brush a Dog's Teeth**

The key is to start when your pet is young so that he will learn to accept your handling his mouth. First assess his teeth to make sure that all of his baby teeth have fallen out. (Some toy breeds suffer from retained teeth. If that's your case, hustle Skippy into the vet and they will take care of it.) Then:

- Begin by running your finger gently along the outside of your dog's gums so that he'll get a feel for it. As this exercise becomes routine, try the inside
- Then, apply doggie toothpaste to a finger wrapped in gauze (or use a special doggie toothbrush) to slowly scrub his teeth. You'll want to use a 45 degree angle and clean the surface of his smile in a circular motion
- Clean the teeth a couple of times per week

#### **When to Seek Professional Help**

If your animal will not accept your help with brushing, you'll have to go to a vet. You'll also want to bring in the big guns if you see visible brown tartar or bleeding. The Vet will give your pet a general anaesthesia and clean the teeth both below and above gum line. While taking care of your pet's dental hygiene might rank right up there with scouring the bathtub, it is a responsibility you'll need to take seriously. Not only does your dogs long term health depend upon it, but you'll want to get the smell of dead toad off his breath before your holiday guests arrive.