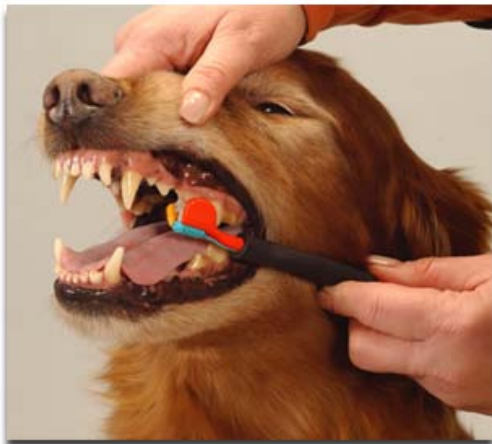


Something to Chew on: Your Dog's Oral Health



HEATHER BROEKER



Smile! Perhaps it's time for a family photo shoot. While your dog's oral health should be a concern year round, this may just be the reminder you need to get your canine's canines (and his incisors, molars and premolars too) in order.

Dog's teeth are pretty incredible – designed to help him get all the nutrients he needs from all kinds of foods. Similar to humans, a dog's set of teeth is comprised with varying types, but one look into your pups grin will show some pretty clear differences.

Types of Dog Teeth

The most easily recognizable and distinct teeth are the canines. Canines look like fangs and they help your dog grab on to things – whether it be the bone you want him to chew or the shoe which you'd rather he not. Getting back to nature, these "fangs" are designed to help him grab hold of another animal. Your dog should have four canines – two on top and two on the bottom.

The "tiny teeth" in the front of your dog's mouth are the incisors. These teeth are used to scrape and chew and are gentle enough (when needed) for him to use them in his cleaning activities. If your dog is burrowing his face into his fur during his personal grooming, he may be trying to get at a flea or other irritant with his incisors.

The major chewing is done by your dog's premolars. There are sixteen of these teeth. And just behind the premolars are the molars which are designed for the hardcore chewing and breaking down of larger items like bones and meat.

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Puppies and Doggies

If you have a new puppy, the little munchers he's got right now, won't be there for long. They are often called "milk teeth," because they come in while the puppy is still nursing. They are tiny and sharp which is why a biting puppy can inflict a little pain when he doesn't realize how strong his chompper really is! Permanent adult teeth will generally start to come in around fourth months of age.

Cleaning Your Dog's Teeth

While your dog's teeth don't need daily brushings because they are not prone to decay like ours, they are prone to gum disease if they are not kept clean. There are many great bones and treats out there that help scrape the tartar that builds along the gum line. Some bones are specifically marketed as "oral cleaning tools," and frequently come in a green color.

When cleaning your dog's teeth, which can be done once or twice a month depending on his diet (softer diets of wet food as opposed to dry may require more frequent cleanings) you can use a size-appropriate tooth brush and a bit of water. You don't need to use human tooth paste. There are doggie pastes you can buy and this is recommended over human tooth paste which can cause an upset stomach if swallowed. If you believe your dog's dental buildup requires a professional, ask your vet who can perform a cleaning.

Gum Disease

If your dog's gums are red, swollen or bleeding or if there is a crusty white or yellowish build up along the gum line, these may be signs of gum disease and you should alert your vet. In addition, if you have frequent problems with bad doggie breath, or worse, if his teeth are falling out, seek veterinarian attention.

by Heather Broeker

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White teeth are important for people and dogs, makes it clear that my teeth are healthy!