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How to teach your pet to tolerate tooth brushing

The trick is to start slowly and progress gradually. Don't proceed to the next step until your pet is comfortable with the current step. You should start out with frequent, short sessions of less than one minute so your pet doesn't feel overwhelmed. Some pets will adjust quickly, while other may need a few weeks. Remember, if your pet truly will not allow you to do this even after repeated attempts, this may be a sign of oral pain and you should have your pet evaluated by your veterinarian.

STEP 1: Allow your pet to get used to gently touching his/her face. (CAUTION: If your pet displays any aggressive tendencies, or tries to nip or bite you, stop immediately and consult your veterinarian). Teach your pet that placing your finger by its mouth means good things are coming. Do this by touching the lips and giving small treats. Repeat two to three times daily until your pet is happy and comfortable.

STEP 2: Lift the lip, touch the gums and reward your pet with praise and a treat. Repeat until your pet relaxes.

STEP 3: Rub the teeth with a piece of gauze or a finger toothbrush which can be dipped in chicken or beef broth to help your pet adjust to the texture. For cats, you can try a cotton swab dipped in tuna juice. Wait for a time when your pet is relaxed before attempting these techniques. Again, keep sessions lengths short (less than a minute).

STEP 4: When you are ready to brush, soft bristles are the key. You may use an angled brush specifically designed for a dog or cat. These can be purchased from any pet store, or our animal hospital. You can also use a soft-bristled pediatric toothbrush. **Always use toothpaste created for pets, never human toothpaste.** Wash the toothbrush after each use and replace it about every 6 months. Hold the jaw nearly closed and lift the lip. Hold the bristles at a 45° angle to the outer surfaces of the teeth and brush in a circular motion. You do not need to brush the inside surfaces. Pay special attention to the back teeth, as the premolars and molars usually collect the most tartar. The whole process should take no longer than a minute or two and should be repeated daily.

*If brushing is truly not an option, please ask us about Science Diet T/D Dental Diet and CET Dental Chews.

