



## Kingsbrook Animal Hospital

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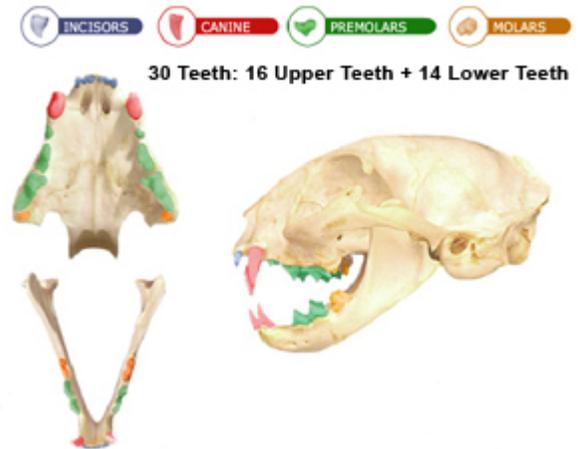
## Brushing Teeth in Cats

### When should I brush my cat's teeth?

Teaching your cat to accept the brushing of its teeth will take some training, but will be relatively easy once he is accustomed to the process. Daily brushing is most beneficial and will help to establish a routine for your pet. Brushing twice a week is acceptable if your schedule cannot accommodate daily brushing.

**"It is best to teach your cat to accept brushing while he or she is still a kitten."**

It is best to teach your cat to accept brushing while he or she is still a kitten. If you have an older cat, the process may take a little longer.



### What steps do I need to follow to teach my cat to accept tooth brushing?

- Choose a quiet time and place to start the brushing. Hold your cat securely in your lap.
- Start by rubbing your finger or a soft cloth over the cat's teeth in a back-and-forth motion. Be careful to stay on the outside surfaces of the teeth to avoid being bitten by accident.

**"Human toothpaste should not be used, as it designed to foam, and is not meant to be swallowed."**

- Once the cat is comfortable with this, let him or her taste a little bit of toothpaste from your finger. Pet toothpaste is recommended for several reasons. The flavor is very appetizing to most cats and may make brushing more enjoyable for them. Pet toothpaste often contains enzymes to help clean the teeth, thereby reducing the amount of actual abrasive brushing that you must perform. Human toothpaste should not be used, as it designed to foam, and is not meant to be swallowed. If swallowed, it can cause an upset stomach; it contains higher levels of sodium than your cat needs.

- Once the cat has accepted the taste of the toothpaste, apply a small amount to a toothbrush. Place your free hand over your cat's head with your thumb and index finger on opposite sides of your cat's upper jaw. Gently raise your cat's lip on one side and begin by brushing one or two of the cheek teeth. A rubber finger toothbrush works well for most cats. This type of toothbrush should be placed right along the gum-line and used in a circular motion. Start from the back and work toward the front of the jaw. In order to brush the lower teeth, you will need to open your cat's mouth just a little. This can be done by gently tilting your cat's head backward while holding onto his or her upper jaw with the thumb and index finger of your free hand.



"The cat's abrasive tongue tends to remove plaque from the inner surfaces of the teeth, reducing the need for brushing these surfaces."

- Do not worry about brushing the tips or insides of the teeth unless your cat is very cooperative. Most of the periodontal lesions occur on the outer surfaces of the teeth and this is where you should direct your efforts. The cat's abrasive tongue tends to remove plaque from the inner surfaces of the teeth, reducing the need for brushing these surfaces.
- Gradually work up to brushing all of the teeth (this will probably take several days or weeks). Make sure you reach the big teeth at the back of the mouth.
- Try to brush for approximately 30 seconds per side.

### My friend recommended that I use baking soda. Is this okay?

No. Baking soda is alkaline and if swallowed can upset the acid balance in the stomach and digestive tract. In addition, baking soda does not taste very good, and may cause your catto be uncooperative when you try to brush its teeth.

### What else can I do to maintain my cat's dental health?

Plaque or biofilm is a gummy substance that begins to accumulate on the teeth within hours after a meal. Within a day, plaque combines with salts that are present in the saliva, mineralizing to become tartar. We find great success with a special dental food made my Science Diet called T/D that is designed to reduce the accumulation of plaque on the teeth.

We also recommend two dental chews to help remove plaque buildup: CET Chews and Greenies. These are especially useful in cats that will not allow you to brush their teeth. We find that **cat's that eat T/D food and use these chews need to have their teeth professionally cleaned much less often.** In addition, you can use an oral rinse designed for use in pets (can be safely swallowed) and tooth waxes such as OraVet to oreduce the formation of plaque and result in improved breath.

Finally, have your veterinarian perform a complete oral health examination and prophylactic dental cleaning and polishing under general anesthetic on a regular basis, such as annually.

Remember – A cat's mouth contains plenty of harmful bacteria, so it is a good idea to wash your hands and the toothbrush thoroughly when you are done.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM*

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