

Home Dental Care: What to do AFTER the Professional Dental Cleaning

Now that the professional cleaning is complete, home care becomes the single most important step in maintaining good oral health. There are many options for home care and some are more labor intensive (and more helpful) than others.

The Veterinary Oral Health Council® (VOHC) reviews hundreds of dental home care products and less than 50 have their seal of approval indicating the products decrease accumulation of plaque and/or calculus by at least 20 percent through a scientific data review. So given a choice, always select the VOHC approved dental care products.

- **Tooth brushing is still #1.** Plaque and tartar accumulate very rapidly without follow-up oral hygiene, so home care is ideal. The gold standard to prevent the accumulation of plaque and tartar is daily tooth brushing. Use a toothbrush and toothpaste made for animals (Virbac C.E.T.® is excellent) to avoid them potentially swallowing excessive fluoride. Choose an appropriate type of toothbrush based on age and size (we can help you with this). If teeth brushing is performed less than once weekly, it may not be worth while. We recommend looking at other options for home care that may be more practical for your lifestyle.
- **Waxy polymers.** When applied to professionally cleaned teeth, the OraVet® polymer adheres to the tooth. In doing so, it inhibits bacterial adhesion to the tooth, which significantly decreases plaque and calculus formation by creating an invisible barrier that decreases bacterial attachment. While other products may remove plaque and tartar, waxy polymers constitute a plaque retention prevention system that is completely safe, tasteless and drug-free. This may be refreshed by weekly application at home via an Oravet home care kit.
- **Water additives.** Developed to be added to a dog or cat's water source, these products can result in a significant reduction in the accumulation of plaque and/or tartar. As the only dental water additive to receive the Veterinary Oral Health Council Seal of Acceptance, Healthy Mouth® is also 100% natural, all organic active ingredients, kosher, vegan, no sugar, no fat and has no chemicals. It has been proven to provide significant control of plaque accumulation, reduce inflammation, diminish gingivitis and soften any remaining plaque. Flavored for dogs & cats, it is in a concentrate that is then pre-mixed with water and used as the primary water source for easy home care. It comes in various flavors and sizes of the concentrate for convenience. In tests, another water additive (Vetradent®-Dechra) resulted in a significant decrease in the accumulation of tartar but lacks a VOHC approval at this time.

- **Mechanical Removal** by means other than brushing can still be helpful. These include treated dental chews, OraVet® Chews and dental diets (T/D) that help by mechanically removing tartar. Unfortunately, these only work on the areas that are in direct contact & tend to miss the front teeth whereas brushing can encompass more of the tooth surfaces. Dental wipes (explained below) can provide mechanical removal almost as well as brushing and allow more coverage of the teeth. They may also include properties noted below (chlorhexidine, zinc sulfate). Dogs that gulp rather than chew should not be fed rawhide chews or large treats for mechanical tartar removal due to risk of obstruction.
- **Soluble zinc salts.** Zinc ascorbate, gluconate, oxide and chloride are incorporated in toothpastes, rinses and gels as antibacterial agents to help decrease plaque formation and malodor. These are helpful in dental wipes or sprays. Infused wipes mechanically remove plaque plus apply plaque control agents to the teeth and gingiva and are quite popular with veterinary professionals.
- **Chlorhexidine.** Chlorhexidine gluconate is one of the leading products used to decrease the accumulation of plaque in people. It is used as an oral rinse to be swished for 30 seconds then expectorated twice daily. This is not feasible with animals. For this reason, chlorhexidine is commonly incorporated with a carrier vehicle such as C.E.T HEXTRA® Chews, dental wipes & sprays.

Gastrointestinal inflammation. Those products that claim control of plaque through chemical means *must* also be safe for the dog or cat to ingest. Excessive protein, preservatives and ingredients such as grain alcohol and xylitol may cause injury to a dog or cat.

Safety against tooth fracture. Chews that are rigid can lead to fractures of the critical shearing teeth. Deer antlers, bones, nylon products, dried yak milk, pizzle or bully sticks and hard plastic toys may claim mechanical plaque and calculus advantages, but unfortunately, they are so hard that chewing can result in tooth fracture with pulp exposure. Avoid feeding bones, offering nylon toys or any product that does not easily bend, compress or dissolve when placed in a fluid environment. This is especially important for dogs that hold the treats with their paws while chewing on the side teeth as that is when fracture of the teeth most often occurs.

Products may be combined. For example, Healthy Mouth® water additive may be provided daily along with dental wipes or OraVet® Chews, which can be used 3-4 times per week for their mechanical advantage. Healthy Mouth® also makes a dental gel that can be applied along the gumline before bed in addition to using the water additive for an extra bit of protection at night.