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Dental Specialist

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Home Care for Cats

Home oral hygiene can make a tremendous difference in your cat's comfort and health. A wide variety of home oral hygiene options are available, but keep in mind that anything you can do to help prevent plaque and tartar accumulation will pay big dividends. What really matters is whether or not home oral hygiene was provided over the long haul – considerable effort applied only for a short period or only occasionally will be of no long-term benefit.

Below are listed some common forms of home oral hygiene that have been proven to be of benefit for cats. Combining several methods will achieve the best results. All methods of home oral hygiene share the goal of preventing or controlling **periodontal disease** by minimizing plaque (bacterial film) accumulation, and preventing the mineralization of the plaque to form dental tartar. Cats can be reluctant to accept home oral hygiene, and require a very gradual, gentle and patient approach to achieve success.

Brushing your cat's teeth is the single most effective means to maintain dental health between professional dental cleanings. This makes sense because the bacterial film known as "plaque" is the cause of **periodontal disease**. This film is easily disrupted by the simple mechanical effect of brushing the teeth. For brushing to be effective, it needs to be done several times each week - daily brushing is best. Most cats will allow their teeth to be brushed, but you need to take a very gradual and gentle approach. Start by letting your cat lick the dentifrice from your finger, then off the small feline toothbrush, then gradually place the brush in your cat's mouth and add the brushing motions. Introduction of this process may require daily activity over 1-2 months. We recommend pet-specific dentifrice for cats; these products are safe for cats and come in flavors that cats accept, such as poultry and seafood. Avoid human toothpastes as they often contain abrasives and high-foaming detergents that should not be swallowed or inhaled. Small cat-specific toothbrushes are available. Some cats prefer finger brushes.

Chlorhexidine is the most effective anti-plaque antiseptic. Chlorhexidine binds to the oral tissues and tooth surfaces, and is gradually released into the oral cavity. Chlorhexidine oral rinses or gels are safe for pets and rarely cause problems. The rinse is applied by squirting a small amount inside the cheek on each side of the mouth. The gel is smeared onto the side of the teeth or applied as a tooth-paste on a tooth-brush or finger brush. Many cats object to the taste of this product, while others accept it with no difficulty.

Several dental-specific diets have been shown to be of benefit in retarding accumulation of dental plaque and tartar cats. Some employ a specific kibble design and others include a chemical anti-tartar poly-phosphate ingredient. Although they may be of value, there is little publicly-available information documenting the dental value of chew products for cats.

Unlike dogs, cats are very individualistic in their acceptance of home oral hygiene. Try several options (brushing, finger-brushing, dental rinses or gels, dental diets) to find those techniques and products that your cat best tolerates. Some cats are very particular about new flavors. Patience and a gentle approach will yield the best results.

The **Veterinary Oral Health Council** (VOHC) Seal of Acceptance is awarded to products that meet or exceed the VOHC standard for retarding accumulation of dental plaque or tartar. A complete listing of products that have been granted the VOHC Seal of Acceptance is available at www.VOHC.org – click the [Products Awarded the VOHC Seal](#) link. The VOHC web site also features additional information about dental disease in pets, and there are other pages on this AVDC web site that may be helpful – [periodontal disease](#), [professional dental scaling](#), [anesthesia-free dental scaling](#).

AVDC Diplomates are familiar with available dental care products and can help tailor a specific home care regimen best suited to you and your pet.