

# Dogs, Nutrition, and Periodontal Disease

**My veterinarian spends lots of time talking to me about my dog's teeth. What do I need to know about periodontal disease and my dog?**



Periodontal disease is the most common problem affecting dogs of all age groups. Diseases that affect the gums can cause pain and infection, in addition to causing the teeth to fall out.

Periodontal disease can also have a secondary effect on major organs, causing or exacerbating organ system

diseases. The very best way to prevent periodontal disease is daily dental home care. This includes an effective, evidence-based dental diet to provide appropriate daily plaque control.

There are four key steps to promote oral health in dogs:

1. Reduce and control plaque. Plaque is the root cause of periodontal disease in dogs.
2. Match plaque control techniques to meet the needs of the individual dog.
3. Feed a nutrient profile with an appropriate texture to contribute to oral health.
4. Stay ahead of plaque accumulation and schedule professional periodontal therapy as recommended by your veterinarian.

The importance of daily dental home care cannot be over-emphasized. If you are having trouble accomplishing dental home care, the veterinary health care team is ready to help. They can show you how to remove plaque using a toothbrush or surgical gauze wrapped around your finger. Do **not** use human toothpaste to brush your dog's teeth; instead, use toothpaste specifically formulated for dogs and cats.

## Eating lots of sugar is associated with dental disease in humans. Is sugar an issue for my dog's oral health?

Studies have shown that sugars (soluble carbohydrates) do not contribute to plaque accumulation in dogs.

## What factors (aside from dental home care) contribute to canine dental disease, and how can I do what is best nutritionally for my dog's mouth and teeth?

Risk factors that contribute to periodontal disease in dogs include:

1. **Breed.** Toy breeds, small dogs, and dogs with short muzzles are prone to overcrowding and rotation of teeth, as well as misalignment. This encourages the accumulation of food and debris between the teeth, leading to periodontal disease.
2. **Age.** The older the dog, the longer dental disease has to accumulate.
3. **Immune system health.** A healthy immune system contributes to a healthy mouth.

Nutrition can help prevent periodontal disease and gingivitis. A diet's texture and make-up can affect the environment of the mouth. It can help maintain tissue integrity, stimulate saliva production, alter plaque bacteria metabolism, and provide mechanical cleansing of tooth surfaces.

Historically, veterinarians recommended feeding dry dog food to prevent periodontal disease in dogs. However, studies have shown that dry food alone does not contribute to improved oral health. It is important to choose a diet that has been specifically developed to enhance oral health.

## **How can I know if the food I am choosing for my dog will actually contribute to his oral health?**

Your veterinarian can recommend a diet proven to be effective in enhancing canine oral health. Alternatively, you can select a dental diet that has been approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC). The VOHC was established in 1997 to provide an independent and objective means of evaluating and recognizing products developed to interrupt plaque accumulation. It evaluates data generated in clinical studies which are performed using VOHC-approved protocols. The VOHC has two levels of award: plaque control and tartar control. Plaque is the primary cause of periodontal disease, so look for the VOHC seal that specifies plaque control.

It is important to use dental diets in a way that achieves their best performance. That generally means daily use for every meal. Mixing a dental diet with another diet will dilute the effects, limiting the effects of the dental diet and preventing it from optimally enhancing your dog's oral health.

Dental food kibbles are built differently than conventional kibbles. They are bigger, forcing the dog to actually chew them instead of swallowing the kibble whole. These larger kibbles scrape plaque from the tooth as the dog bites through them.

## **How can I find out which canine dental diets have earned the VOHC seal for plaque control?**

A complete list of all products (not just food) that have been awarded the VOHC seal is available at [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org).