

# The ABCs of Dog Teeth Cleaning

How often should you get your dog's teeth professionally cleaned? How much should it cost? Is there any way to lower the cost of cleaning your dog's teeth? Find out the answers to all of these questions, as well as tips to help keep your pup's teeth pearly white.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

Mar 10, 2023 • 5 min read

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Small dogs typically need a dental cleaning once a year while larger dogs may need a cleaning once every 1.5 to two years, without daily preventive hygiene at home
- Costs vary widely, from \$250 for a simple cleaning, plus pre-anesthetic bloodwork, to \$1,300 or more for a more complicated case involving tooth extractions
- February is Pet Dental Health Month, so many veterinarians offer a discount for dentals that month
- If you have your pet's teeth professionally cleaned as often as necessary to keep their mouths in stellar condition, they'll be less likely to need more expensive extractions and complex care
- Regular at-home brushing in between professional cleanings, safe dental stimulation and biologically appropriate, minimally processed food can help keep your pet's mouth as healthy as possible over time

Brushing your dog's teeth regularly is one of the best ways to keep his mouth healthy. It only takes a few days without brushing for tartar to build on your dog's teeth, which can progress into dental diseases that puts your dog's overall health at risk.

A fresh, species-appropriate diet and appropriate bones and chews will also help your dog's teeth accumulate far less tartar, compared to eating a starch-heavy, ultraprocessed diet. However, even with a healthier, more natural diet, many pets still require professional cleaning to maintain optimal oral health.

Many dogs, genetically, have very weak, porous enamel, with signs of dental disease occurring by 3 years of age. If you aren't working daily to prevent oral disease from occurring, disease happens even faster.

Your veterinarian can let you know when it's time for a professional cleaning, but if mouths go unmanned (daily dental care isn't provided), small dogs typically need a dental cleaning once a year while larger dogs may need a cleaning once every 1.5 to two years.

Signs of dental disease in pets include an accumulation of brown or greenish plaque and tartar on the teeth, along with red gums. You may also notice your dog chewing more on one side of the mouth, dropping food, hesitating to eat or chew, crying when yawning, no longer enjoying chew toys, drooling and acting irritable. Bad breath is another telltale sign.

## How Much Does Dog Teeth Cleaning Cost?

The cost of getting your dog's teeth professionally cleaned depends on the extent of their dental disease and the services provided. According to PetMD:<sup>1</sup>

*"Teeth cleanings with general practitioners can range from \$250-\$900, which may or may not include extractions. Veterinary dentists typically cost more based on their advanced training, equipment, and anesthesia. A typical service with x-rays, exams, and cleanings starts at \$800-\$1,300. Nerve blocks, extractions, medications, advanced imaging such as CTs, and root canals will increase the price."*

Veterinary dental specialist visits will also be more expensive, as you're paying for more specialized equipment and their ability to expertly manage complicated oral problems. Further, since dogs won't hold still for a cleaning, anesthesia is required to clean below the gumline (where bacteria hide).

Anesthesia is typically included in the overall cost of the dental procedure, however prior to anesthesia, a blood panel is necessary to check organ function, blood cell and platelet counts, to ensure your pet is healthy enough for the procedure. This test may cost \$75 to \$200 and may or may not be included in the cost of the dental procedure.<sup>2</sup>

You may also be given the option of using IV fluids during the procedure. As noted by veterinarian Dr. Kyle Grusling in Whole Dog Journal, if your clinic recommends but doesn't require IV fluids, this is one area where it's worth the extra expense.<sup>3</sup>

*"Some clinics recommend but charge for the delivery of IV fluids as a separate option. I understand the urge to save money, but as an advocate for my patients, I have to say that this is not a time or place to scrimp. The placement and use of an IV catheter enables the veterinary team to deliver any needed medications to your dog in the fastest way possible."*

*"If your dog were to experience any life-threatening complications during his procedures, an IV would be the fastest way to deliver the life-saving drugs that could bring him back from the brink. The IV is also used to deliver pain-control medications to keep your dog comfortable before, during, and after the procedure. (Some other pain-control medications may be administered orally and through local injection.)"*

I agree wholeheartedly. Pre-anesthetic bloodwork, IV catheters and pain management should not be optional in veterinary medicine, just as they aren't optional in human medicine; it's all a part of standard of care.

You may also be given an option to have x-rays taken of your dog's teeth. "Dental radiographs (x-rays) are another service that are usually charged separately as an option, but their value is so great that their expense is always worth it," Grusling says.<sup>4</sup> Oftentimes the only way to identify tooth root abscesses or other major issues is by seeing what's going on below the surface of what we can see.

Thankfully, most clinics use digital radiology, which carries far less radiation exposure than the older radiology systems.

## What Happens During a Doggy Dental?

During the dental procedure, the veterinarian will take x-rays of your dog's mouth, if needed, and conduct a complete oral exam, checking each tooth for fractures, cavities and other problems. "Common painful problems that could be identified with radiographs [x-rays] are broken teeth and roots, periodontal disease, dead teeth, abscesses or infected teeth," according to the American Veterinary Dental College.<sup>5</sup>

Your vet will also use dental probes to measure the depths of the pockets in the gum around each tooth. Scaling will be conducted to remove plaque and tartar from the teeth both above and below the gum line. This may include the use of an ultrasonic scaler that removes calculus using a high vibrational frequency.<sup>6</sup> The teeth are then polished to leave a smooth surface, which discourages bacteria and plaque from collecting.

If a tooth is fractured or too diseased to remain in the mouth, an extraction will be necessary at an additional cost. This may cost up to \$400 per tooth, depending on the size of the tooth, the type of extraction and how much time it takes.<sup>7</sup>

## Can You Lower the Cost of Cleaning Your Dog's Teeth?

February is Pet Dental Health Month, so many veterinarians offer a discount for dentals that month. By planning ahead, you may be able to take advantage of this discount for your pet. Daily home dental care, however, will be key to keeping the cost of cleanings down. If you have your pet's teeth professionally cleaned on a regular basis, as needed to maintain excellent oral health, they'll be less likely to need more expensive extractions and complex care later on.

**Regular at-home brushing**, nightly, in between professional cleanings, is critical for slowing the rate plaque and tartar accumulates. The video above shows a step-by-step guide to brushing your pet's teeth. The video features a cat, but the process is much the same for a dog.

### Sources and References

<sup>1, 2, 7</sup> [PetMD January 4, 2023](#)

<sup>3, 4, 6</sup> [Whole Dog Journal October 17, 2018](#)

<sup>5</sup> [American Veterinary Dental College, What Is a Professional Veterinary Dental Cleaning?](#)

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