

# What to Look for in Your Pet's Toothpaste

Just like humans, pets need regular toothbrushing to keep their oral health in top shape. But not just any toothpaste and toothbrush will do.

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Enzymatic toothpaste is used for pet dental care. It contains specific enzymes like glucose oxidase and lactoperoxidase that break down food particles and bacteria, making it safer than human toothpaste
- Never use human toothpaste on pets as it contains xylitol, an artificial sweetener that can be fatal to animals by lowering blood sugar and causing liver damage
- Before brushing your pets' teeth, gradually acclimate them through facial massages, then progress to touching their mouth, using gauze and finally introducing a finger toothbrush and real pet toothbrush
- Focus on brushing the upper back molars where plaque and tartar accumulate most heavily, and aim for nightly brushing. However, even once or twice weekly brushing provides significant benefits
- Research shows that pets eating raw, natural diets accumulate less tartar than those on processed foods, highlighting the importance of transitioning away from kibble to raw food for your pet's oral health

Having clean teeth is not just an important part of hygiene for humans — your pet needs it, too. They're not immune from having plaque and gingivitis, which are factors that lead to periodontal disease. To keep your pet's mouth healthy, regularly brushing their teeth is essential, and the first step begins by choosing a safe, pet-friendly toothpaste.

## What to Look for in Pet-Friendly Toothpaste

The first step in brushing teeth is choosing the right toothpaste, but not just any will do. Ideally, you should buy toothpaste formulated for cats and dogs — enzymatic toothpaste. Dr. Liz McCalley explains why this is the correct choice for your pet:<sup>1</sup>

*“Enzymatic toothpaste for dogs is a type of toothpaste that contains enzymes — proteins that speed up chemical reactions. In dog toothpaste, these enzymes help break down food particles, sugars and bacteria in your dog's mouth, making it harder for plaque to form.*

*Unlike human toothpaste, enzymatic toothpaste for dogs is safe to swallow. In fact, many options come in flavors like chicken or peanut butter to appeal to dogs' palates. This makes it easier for pet parents to establish a regular brushing routine without the struggle.”*

Different enzymes are used in this pet-friendly toothpaste. The most commonly used ones include:<sup>2</sup>

- **Glucose oxidase** — Produces hydrogen peroxide, which helps reduce bacteria
- **Lactoperoxidase** — Another antibacterial enzyme
- **Amyloglucosidase** — Breaks down complex sugars into simple ones, which helps prevent the buildup of plaque

Aside from being formulated specifically for animals, another great thing about enzymatic toothpaste is the flavor. They're specially created with flavors that pets usually eat, such as beef and chicken, to make it more palatable.

A final reminder — never use human toothpaste on your pet. Most toothpastes made for human use contain xylitol, an artificial sweetener that can be fatal to animals. It's known to lower blood sugar levels and cause liver damage.

## **It's Not Just Toothpaste — Brushing Is Also Important**

Oral health is not just about the quality of the toothpaste you use. It's also important to brush your pet's teeth regularly. But before you start brushing, you must lay the groundwork. If you go straight to brushing, your pet will most likely not have a pleasant experience. Start with incorporating facial and gum massages into your daily interaction with your pet, so they aren't stressed having their faces touched.

Once your pet is accustomed to having their mouths and lips touched, start moving a finger around their mouth briefly. If the response is positive, continue doing that, then gradually move to a piece of gauze, then to a finger toothbrush, and finally a real pet toothbrush.

After transitioning to a pet toothbrush, place a tiny dab of enzymatic toothpaste (ideally containing natural ingredients you can pronounce) on your finger. Then, gently pull back their lip and quickly rub the toothpaste over your pet's back molars on one side.

It's crucial to emphasize brushing the upper back molars, as this is where most plaque and tartar accumulate. So, take your time consistently rubbing toothpaste in that area. Once your pet gets used to the routine and everything is going smoothly, move to the front teeth, including the premolars, canines and incisors. Ideally, brushing your pet's teeth should be done nightly to boost their oral health, but doing it even once or twice a week will already make a big difference.

## **Diet Also Plays a Role in Oral Health**

The importance of feeding a raw, species-appropriate diet cannot be overstated when it comes to your pet's dental health. In a study published in the Australian Veterinary Journal, researchers noted that feral cats who ate a natural diet consisting of their prey have dramatically less accumulation of tartar.<sup>3</sup> Based on these findings, transitioning your pet from ultraprocessed kibble and onto a raw diet will help slow down the buildup of tartar and plaque.

The operative word here is "slow," because even if you feed a raw diet to your pet, plaque and tartar will still accumulate. However, the benefit is that it occurs at a slower rate. If you have a cat, another option to help "clean" their teeth is them offering a skinless chicken neck, which may entice your cat to chew, providing mechanical abrasion to help prevent plaque buildup.

Also, cats are masters at hiding pain, including the ones originating from their teeth. Schedule a dental exam from your veterinarian to discover any problems, so you can develop a course of action if any problems are found.

All in all, adhering to regular brushing in between professional cleanings and feeding a fresh, raw diet, there's a good chance your kitty's teeth will stay clean and healthy, as well as maintain fresh breath.

## Sources and References

<sup>1,2</sup> [Great Pet Care, November 30, 2024](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Aust Vet J., 1998 October; 76\(10\): 690-693, Abstract](#)

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