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How to Brush Your Cat's Teeth

Congratulations on deciding to brush your cat's teeth! Below are step-by-step instructions to assist you. Please read through them all first, as well as the tips on how to teach your cat to accept you brushing her teeth, before you try it for the first time.

Remember to take your time and take a break if you feel you or your cat becoming stressed.

Supplies

- Soft-bristled toothbrush for cats or finger toothbrush\
- Veterinary toothpaste for cats (Please note that human toothpaste can be toxic to cats!)
- Soft gauze sponge or cloth

If you are unsure where to find these supplies, please ask your veterinarian for recommendations.

How to Brush Your Cat's Teeth

Remember that patience is a virtue – don't force the issue. Keep this positive, and you will be surprised how successful you can be!

1. Begin by gently handling and manipulating your cat's mouth.

- If your cat is calm, start with affectionate touches and give her treats.
- Begin to gently touch or manipulate your cat's mouth. As long as your cat is quiet, responds to requests, and allows you to manipulate her mouth, give her IMMEDIATE rewards. If your cat resists at all, take the treats away and stop for now. (You can try again later.)
- Slowly advance from moving her lips with your fingers to running your fingers along her teeth and gums. Once your cat is comfortable with your fingers in her mouth, try to put a moist, soft gauze sponge around your finger and move it along her teeth.
- It will likely take several sessions to work up to this point. Give rewards throughout, and end the session if your cat resists. Try again tomorrow.

2. Add in toothpaste.

- Once your cat is comfortable with the sponge or cloth along her teeth, add a veterinary toothpaste or gel to the gauze sponge.
- Keep up the praise and rewards! Make it fun!

3. Introduce the toothbrush.

- Bring out the toothbrush. Touch it to your cat's face, put it under her lips, and gently work it around. Pick a toothbrush that is easy for you to use.
- If your cat likes the toothpaste, have her lick it off the toothbrush. Don't forget to praise and reward with treats!

4. **Start brushing.**

- Use a circular motion and focus on your cat's gum line.
- Initially concentrate on the outside surfaces of her teeth, under her lips. Eventually work your way up to all of your cat's teeth. Spend about 2-3 minutes brushing her entire mouth, ideally once a day.

Teaching Your Cat to Accept Toothbrushing

The goal is to brush all of the outside surfaces of your cat's teeth once a day, using a soft-bristled toothbrush and veterinary toothpaste. It may take several weeks for your cat to become comfortable with your brushing her teeth. It is important to be consistent with your routine and to keep this a positive experience for you and your cat.

- **Select your time:** Cats respond to routine, so be consistent with the time you brush her teeth every day. Pick a time of day that is quiet and when your cat is usually hungry – not first thing after you get home from work.
- **Choose the reward:** Pick a reward that motivates your cat – a food she loves or something else that makes her happy (i.e. play, petting, or brushing). If you are using food, have tiny bits of the food available.
- **Set the surroundings and keep it positive:**
 - Place your cat next to you on a large chair, couch, or in your lap.
 - Remember to use a calm, gentle tone of voice and maintain a positive attitude and demeanor. Your cat will sense and respond to any anxiety you may have.
 - If your cat thinks this is a fun game that involves rewards, she will be eager to play.
 - Remember to be persistent, but have reasonable expectations about how fast you will progress.

Other Products: Diets, Treats, Chews, & Water

While brushing your cat's teeth is the best thing you can do for your cat's oral health, dental products like diets, chews, treats, and water additives may also provide some benefit. The VOHC (Veterinary Oral Health Council) is an organization that reviews voluntary product submissions and associated scientific literature, and awards the VOHC Seal of Acceptance as appropriate. For a list of products that have been awarded the VOHC Seal of Acceptance, please visit: www.VOHC.org.

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