

Day-One Dog Training

Hey, Dog Breath!

By Howard Weinstein

As nicknames go, “Dog Breath” isn’t a compliment. And if your dog’s breath wilts houseplants at twenty paces, that’s no laughing matter – it’s a sign there’s something wrong. How often do you check your dog’s mouth? For many dog owners, the answer is, “Never.” Maybe no one ever suggested that you should. Well, you *should!*

Other signs of trouble? When your dog avoids chewing on one side of her mouth, as happened with our little Welsh Corgi Callie one day. We took a closer look and discovered not one but two broken molars. One was already infected, but both had to be pulled. She still had 40 teeth left and was soon back to chomping her food and catching flying toys again. But there could’ve been serious ramifications had we not peeked inside the “jaws of death.”

While dogs rarely get cavities (partly because they don’t – or shouldn’t – eat all the sweets that we do), they do get plaque and tartar build-up, and that can destroy teeth and gums. Bad teeth lead to poor health, including tooth loss and infections that may enter the bloodstream and even cause heart, liver and kidney disease.

How can we help our pals keep their teeth and live longer, healthier and happier lives? Start by brushing your dog’s teeth regularly. How often? Once a day is ideal, but even a few times a week is better than not brushing at all. It only takes a couple of minutes. You can use almost any soft-bristle tooth-brush (we use a child-size Oral-B brush for Mickey and Callie).

However, since it’s hard to teach dogs to rinse and spit, don’t use people toothpaste (which will upset their stomachs when swallowed). Use toothpaste formulated for dogs (available from vets

and pet-supply stores). Dog toothpaste comes in flavors, so they actually like the stuff – the toughest part may be getting the toothbrush inside your dog’s mouth before she licks off the toothpaste. Look for the dog toothpaste containing enzymes, which react with your dog’s saliva to attack plaque.

If you’ve never brushed your dog’s teeth, let her lick a dab of toothpaste first off your finger, and then the toothbrush. Repeat for a couple of days, and then try gently brushing the front teeth. Progress to brushing the

side and back teeth by gently lifting your dog’s lip and slipping the toothbrush inside. You’ll never get every surface, and you don’t really have to. Some brushing is better than none. And regular brushing gives you a better chance to spot problems like bleeding gums, infections and loose or broken teeth.

Some food manufacturers have developed large-chunk food brands (including, at one point, Nutro Natural Choice Dental Care Formula and Hill’s T/D). There’s some clinical evidence showing that these foods reduce plaque and tartar by “scrubbing” the teeth as your dog crunches the kibble.

Even with brushing, dogs may still need to have their teeth cleaned periodically by your vet under anesthesia. It’s not cheap, but it’s cheaper than emergency dental surgery – and it’s a small price to pay for keeping your dog happy and healthy, right? Ask your vet for other dental-care advice.

P.S. Here’s a useful addition to your bookshelf – *The Doctors Book of Home Remedies for Dogs and Cats*, published by Prevention Magazine and Bantam Books. This big paperback includes tons of practical health-care tips, which may save you unnecessary trips to the vet – and keep you from inadvertently harming your pal.



Howard Weinstein is the author of *Puppy Kisses are Good for the Soul & Other Important Lessons You & Your Dog Can Teach Each Other* (available from Amazon.com, or direct from Day-One Dog Training).

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