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Teeth cleaning.

What's the biggest disease culprit I see in most dogs, regardless of age, breed, sex and immune status?

Dental disease.

It may sound surprising, but *more than 3 out of 4 dogs over the age of 3* have oral disease.

If not addressed immediately and thoroughly, dental disease can strip your pets of not only their teeth, but their overall health.

Poor dental care – the main culprit – can weaken the surface of your pet's gums.

This breakdown of gum tissue allows mouth bacteria to enter your pet's bloodstream and travel throughout his body.

Unfortunately, this oral bacteria is potent and is usually hardy enough to resist attacks by your pet's immune system.

Unchecked, the oral bacteria can ultimately affect multiple organ systems, including your pet's heart.

Proper oral care, including regular brushing and professional dental checkups, is obviously the first and most important step you must take to help protect your pet.

There's something else you can do to help keep your dog's teeth clean, in addition to regular brushing.

But unlike brushing, this is something he enjoys, and will likely even look forward to...

So how can you tell if you're dog's dental care needs more attention?

According to the American Veterinary Dental Society (AVDS), 80 percent of dogs show oral distress by age 3.

It's one of the most common health issues treated in animal health clinics today, and certainly in mine.

While small dogs are especially prone to dental issues as they often have smaller mouths and crowded teeth, *all* dogs need good, regular oral care.

Small dogs, like this Shih Tzu, often have small mouths and crowded teeth, so they need extra attention to their dental health.

One of the most common signs of serious oral and dental issues is bad breath – or what's called halitosis.

I don't consider so-called 'doggy breath' to be normal.

If your dog has bad breath, I recommend a trip to your veterinarian (preferably one who practices integrative veterinary medicine) for a thorough oral exam.

And please, don't put it off.

Bad breath can be a sign of serious tooth and gum issues. Your pet may already be suffering without you knowing it.

Here's the other question you need to ask yourself... How diligent are you with brushing your dog's teeth?

Your dog depends on you to do that for them.

Brush your dog's teeth every day.

Just like you wouldn't neglect your own teeth as part of your overall good health – you must be proactive with your dog's teeth.

She needs your attention to this important aspect of her health now more than ever.

Your pet's teeth are just as prone to plaque and tarter build-up as are yours.

And she needs regular care, exams and cleanings just like you...

Follow this checklist to give your dog's teeth the care it deserve.

Your dog depends on you to clean his teeth.

When food remains on your dog's teeth, plaque forms.

If not removed, plaque continues to build on your pet's teeth and eventually hardens.

This can result in serious tooth and gum issues for your dog.

That's why I recommend brushing your dog's teeth daily – just like you would your own teeth.

It's the best way to ensure strong, healthy teeth.

If you have a puppy, incorporate good oral hygiene from day one.

Incorporating gentle dental care (consider using a soft piece of gauze with a small dot of dog toothpaste) consistently when your dog is young conditions your dog to this routine.

Here's a quick checklist to help you start taking better care of your dog's teeth:

Have your dog's teeth checked and professionally cleaned when needed– follow your vet's advice for regular cleanings.

Instead of a human toothbrush, use a soft-bristle brush **Eco-Friendly Pet Toothbrush** and a gentle pet toothpaste (**Dental Gel**, especially when used with a brush, is ideal for daily use to help clean teeth and gums, and freshen breath).

Brush your dog's teeth on a daily basis, and use **Dental Gel** for those times when you can't brush.

In between brushing, provide your dog with a tasty dental chew bone

Now, I know how stubborn some dogs can be about having their teeth brushed.

Your veterinarian is your best guide to determining what your dog needs, and that may include regular cleanings.

So, what else can you do to help keep your pet's teeth clean and mouth fresh-smelling?

Edible dental chews.

The right ones can provide good mechanical abrasion as your dog grinds and chews them.

However, just like dry crackers won't clean your teeth, hard, dry dog bones won't get the debris and buildup off your dog's teeth either – even if certain manufacturers advertise they will.

They must be just the right consistency...

And the ingredients they contain matter too.

The last thing you want to do is offer your pet something that could work against all your good efforts to keep him healthy.

Know this : Many common dental chew bones may be hazardous.

Most pet parents have no idea what's in the bones – or dental chew bones – they buy for their dogs.

The next time you're at the pet store, pick up a package of one of those popular 'green' dental chew bones for dogs and read the ingredients.

You'll be amazed...

Here are some of the not-so-natural "feed grade" ingredients you'll see listed:

Gelatin: A potentially toxic animal by-product, created by boiling down various unused parts of animals such as skin, tendon, bone, cartilage and connective tissue.

Hydrogenated starch hydrolysate (HSH):

Low-carbohydrate artificial sweetener.

Soy protein isolate:

Known allergen, with reduced vitamin, mineral, and protein quality – and increased levels of potential carcinogens.

What's in the dog chews you're buying now?

And that's just a tiny portion of a very long list of ingredients I believe don't belong in any kind of food or treat for your pup.

Additionally, because these trendy dental chews are so tough and difficult to break down in your dog's mouth, your pet can swallow them almost whole – leading to a mass of undigested gunk potentially blocking her intestinal tract.

The chews simply can't be digested, and they could end up lodging in your dog's esophagus or intestines – remaining hard and solid for days. The outcome?

If you make it to a veterinarian in time, immediate surgery might save your dog's life.

But there are many documented reports of dogs not making it through bowel obstruction surgery – tragic, but true.

The unquenchable need of puppies to chew.

One way a puppy learns about his world is with his mouth.

If you've ever raised a puppy, then you know what I'm about to tell you. They like to chew – anything and everything!

And those new, razor-sharp teeth can shred toys, shoes, clothing, furniture, pillows and blankets almost faster than you or I can blink an eye.

Puppies chew for many different reasons, including...

To play.

To ease teething discomfort.

To relieve stress, boredom, and loneliness.

To explore and interact with their "new" world.

Teething, especially, is a time when your puppy has an intense need to chew. Just as a baby's gums become sore as teeth erupt, so do your puppy's during their first six months of life.

Chewing on something soft, but firm, helps relieve pain and provides comfort.

But that's not all...

Now Is the time to teach positive chewing behaviors?

Chewing is simply a normal part of normal puppy growth and development.

It's up to you to shape your puppy's behavior by teaching them what's appropriate to chew – and what's not.

And when you start your puppy off right – that is, by providing an acceptable and enjoyable item to chew when they need and want it most – you help establish positive chewing behaviors for years to come. Everything considered, you want a healthy dental chew that you ***know*** is safe.