



Dental Care at Home



There are so many dental products for pets in the stores. How do you choose? Which ones work? Are they safe? It can be overwhelming! Here's some basic information and highlights on common dental products on the market today:

Basic Information:

What is the difference between plaque and tartar and why do I care? Plaque is a living film on the teeth composed of bacteria, food, and saliva. When plaque calcifies due to the minerals in saliva, it turns into tartar. This can occur in as little as 24 hours. Plaque and tartar can cause bad breath and an ugly build up on the teeth. However, it is the bacteria in plaque that goes underneath the gum line (where you cannot see it) and that is the true enemy. This subgingival plaque is what leads to gingivitis, infection, loose teeth, abscesses, etc (periodontal disease).

What to look for in Dental Home Products:

- **Clinical Studies**

If a product has been “clinically proven” to do something (ex. remove plaque) that means there must have been at least 2 scientific studies that have shown the product does what it claims to do. Any product can make a claim, show ugly “before” and pretty “after” pictures, have testimonies, etc. However, if there is no scientific evidence then buyer beware.

- **VOHC seal of approval**

The Veterinary Oral Health Council is composed of a number of board certified veterinary dentists. This is a panel of experts that analyze dental products and is another way of looking at evidence based recommendations on products.

- **Safety**

Veterinary dentists usually recommend products with some “give” to them. If you place your fingernail on the product you want to be able to leave a little indent. If not the product may be too hard and could actually cause a tooth to crack or fracture.

Common Home Dental Care Products:

- **Brushing**

Brushing your pet's teeth is the gold standard for home care because it is the #1 best thing you can do for your pet's oral health. Daily brushing has been clinically proven to control gingivitis. Use any soft toothbrush, hold at a 45 degree angle, and be sure to brush up to the gum line and not just the surface of the tooth (like brushing your own teeth). Edible pet toothpaste can be helpful but is not required. Daily brushing mechanically removes bacteria on the tooth surface and just below the gum line (where the real enemy is).



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- **Greenies**



Greenies mechanically remove plaque and tartar. They do help the surface of tooth more than the gingival margin. Greenies have a VOHC seal to control and tartar in dogs and control tartar in cats. For best results it is recommended this treat daily. The greenies company re-formulated their recipe years ago to their products safer and dissolvable. This was after some cases of eager dogs swallowing the treats whole and then getting stuck in the intestinal tract. This is a safety that I don't know if copy cat products have.



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- **Rawhides**

Like Greenies, rawhides act to mechanically remove plaque and tartar. This helps surface more than the gingival margin. Therefore, it makes the tooth look prettier with bad breath. There is some concern for choking if pets swallow large pieces or can sometimes get stuck in the stomach or intestines. It is best to give rawhides supervised and remove the rawhide when it gets to a small enough piece your pet swallow it.



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- **Oravet**



Oravet is a dental sealant that is applied to the teeth to provide a barrier. There is an at home product that is applied weekly and a professional product that is applied by a veterinarian or veterinary technician immediately after a dental cleaning. In clinical studies the professional application has been proven to decrease plaque by 42% for up to a month.

- **Maxiguard**

This is an oral gel that is tasteless and odorless which makes it well tolerated by most cats and dogs. It is used to help with post-operative healing and helps with gingivitis.



- **T/D and Healthy Advantage Oral +**

These are dental diets. The kibble is large which forces pets to chew instead of swallowing the food. They work as an abrasive on the tooth surface to remove plaque and calculus. Both canine and feline T/D has a VOHC seal to help control tartar and plaque. T/D and Healthy Advantage have also undergone feeding trials to substantiate that these diets provide complete and balanced nutrition for adult pets (both dog and cats).



- **Products Not Recommended**

Deer antlers, pig ears, cow hooves, and bully sticks. These products generally follow the rule of products that are too hard and can potentially cause fractures of the teeth. In addition, these products are commonly recalled due to contamination issues (E. coli, Salmonella, etc).