

DENTAL EDUCATION

Move from good to better to best.



We recently asked pet owners on social media where they're at in terms of their pet's teeth. We were surprised at the wide range of answers – from using raw food so no need to brush to brushing twice a day. Their answers may sound familiar:

"Have to admit, I never do it – need to!!! But I give them healthy things to chew on. I always feel they would never let me brush their teeth."

"My goal is to brush my cat's teeth once a week ... ends up being probably every other week."

"We use a daily water treatment for teeth and a spray plus dental chews."

"My dogs do it themselves, given raw meaty bones each week."

"I've been brushing my dog's teeth since puppy and they're still clean with no buildup. I'd like to brush her teeth every day but it's not realistic. We do every few days/a few times a week and supplement with a breath freshener that I put in her water that's supposed to reduce tartar buildup. I do it Monday, Wednesday and Fridays."

"Initially, I thought it was a little weird – 'People brush their dog's teeth?' – but I actually see the value in it now. I have greyhounds and they really need their teeth brushed every day."

"It's just something difficult and awkward to do so it's hard to want to do it."

"I should have brushed my pug's teeth. Even with yearlys, dental bones, etc., her mouth is a mess."

"I am motivated by the thought of bad teeth causing internal organ damage. I want my babies to live as long as possible!"

"I don't know anyone who brushes their dog's teeth."

"We never brushed our dog's teeth when I was a kid. But that was many, many years ago before there were so many products on the market for pets and pet care was not at the level that it is today. I think from 2010 on, the entire industry has exploded, which is a good thing. There is more awareness out there and people are more invested in preventive health for their pets."

"I never brushed my first Jack's teeth. He was getting older and had a tumor by his mouth, so we had it removed and his teeth cleaned while under. They had to remove 19 bad teeth."

"We brush every other day or so and feed Hill's t/d (tooth diet)."

"As a kid, we were categorically told NEVER to brush a dog's teeth."

"Raw diet and no teeth cleaning required."

"I don't want to lose a finger!"

"Vet tech here.... I know I should brush my pets' teeth (dogs and cats). But I don't. I tried to get into a daily routine of doing it – and failed. It is the ideal, I know. But I am a pet teeth brushing failure! I resort to dental chews mostly for my canine and feline pets. So all of you who manage to do regular brushing, I'm impressed! (No sarcasm – I seriously am impressed!) I recommend it to people all the time – and usually tell them if they do, they are doing better than I am."

"My dog HATES you sticking your fingers in her mouth unless it's the vet (oddly enough)."

"She eats bones."

And lastly, even Yoda seemed to chime in:
"Bully stick I use."



The array of answers probably reflects your client base pretty well. From raw diet to bones, everyone is doing what they think is best. Here are some thoughts on inching clients toward more preventive care.

Passive versus active care

Dr. Jeffrey Schreiber is an Omaha, Nebraska-based veterinary dental specialist. He was recently a guest on the *Pure Dog Talk* podcast, hosted by Laura Reeves. Canine dentistry was a *listener* request and *Pure Dog Talk* responded!

He has a rather delightful way of thinking about patient oral health, too. “Dogs are supposed to have 42 teeth. Each tooth is a patient in and of itself.”

Do one active and one passive activity every day.

As you might guess, Schreiber is a strong advocate of regular dental cleanings while the patient is anesthetized. In his experience, there are a few ways to break down what clients can do at home: active activity and passive activity. He encourages clients to do one of each every day and breaks it down as follows:

Active

With active activity, you buy the product and you do the work.

Brushing will always be gold standard – at a 45-degree angle to the tooth structure so the bristles go up underneath the gumline with an enzymatic-based toothpaste.

A chlorhexidine rinse is something Schreiber uses in his office, along the patient’s gumline. He finds that ease of use means owners are more likely to do it.



Passive

With passive activity, you buy the product and your pet does the work.

Schreiber says this is the one everyone jumps on, because it’s easy. He advises clients to look for VOHC-approved products. VOHC.org has a list of products approved for efficacy in removing plaque; Greenies and Hill’s Diet t/d are on this list.



Then, Schreiber said, tell clients to **do one active and one passive activity every day.**

You never know what will resonate with your clients or when they will be open to receiving, processing and taking action on the information. Simply knowing doesn’t always translate into doing. So, here are a few “sound bites” to use to inch your clients further along to better dental care.

- Just like people, brushing is the gold standard.
- Greenies *in addition* to brushing; not *instead* of brushing.
- 60% of tooth structure is below the gumline.
- What goes on in the mouth affects the whole body.