

*An Owner's Manual to:*

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# TOOTH-BRUSHING: WHY TO DO IT, AND HOW

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*by the*  
AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB



**dogtown**  
RESORT

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### **ABOUT THIS SERIES**

At the AKC, we know better than anyone that your dog can't be treated like a car or an appliance, but we've named this series "An Owner's Manual" because sometimes you probably wish your lovable companions came with one.

These concise guides give you the tools, tips, and direction to be a responsible and confident dog owner who brings out the best in your dog. Give them a test drive!



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Raise your hand if you're vigilant about brushing your dog's teeth every day. If you've got your arm up, we salute you. If you don't ... well, it's not too late to start. We've all been told to brush our dog's teeth. Unfortunately it's a task that often falls through the cracks. For some, time is the problem, for others it's an uncooperative dog who makes it impossible to get a toothbrush near her molars. Whatever the reason, it's clear that brushing teeth is low on the priority list for most pet owners. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) estimates that by age 3, 80 percent of dogs show signs of oral disease.

But this one simple daily routine can have a major impact on your dog's health.



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Veterinary dentist Thoulton W. Surgeon vividly recalls the patient who most clearly demonstrated the importance of brushing a dog's teeth. What struck him first was the poor animal's breath: he could smell it from across the room. When the doctor got close enough to take a look, he discovered a mouth of horrors—red, inflamed, bleeding gums, teeming with bacteria, and brown and yellow stained enamel. Pulling 13 teeth was unavoidable. After giving the dog a thorough cleaning, Surgeon sent the owner home with marching orders: “Brush his teeth!”



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Years passed before Surgeon saw this particular patient again. When he did, he was shocked. The teeth were still glistening and white. Surgeon asked the owner how she did it. The answer was simple:

“She said, ‘Anytime I brush my teeth, I brush his, too,’” Surgeon recalls. Twice-a-day brushing had been enough to keep this dog’s mouth looking like that of a 6-month-old puppy.



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## WHIFF OF TROUBLE

There are obvious problems associated with a dirty mouth. Who wants to be kissed by a canine companion whose breath can make you faint? Or to look at yellow and brown stained teeth?

Worst of all, bad teeth can trigger serious, even life-threatening, health problems in a dog, including heart, kidney, liver, and joint disease. The link of gum disease to heart conditions in humans has been well established. Now research is showing that the same thing happens in dogs. A study of the health records of 59,296 dogs showed that dogs with gum disease had more heart problems. OK, enough of the guilt trip . . . .



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## EARLIER IS EASIER

- As with other sensitive grooming tasks, such as nail clipping, dental hygiene is easiest if start with a young puppy. You can get him accustomed to brushing by gently running a finger with veterinary toothpaste over his teeth, then rewarding.
- Once the dog is used to the sensation, use a systematic approach, brushing each tooth with a gentle, circular motion. Not too much pressure—you want to stimulate the gums but not damage them.



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- Use a toothbrush designed for dogs, which has very soft bristles.
  - Use toothpaste made for dogs: It comes in flavors, like chicken and peanut butter, that make brushing more appealing to the canine palate.





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## CONSISTENCY IS KEY

- To encourage daily brushing, it makes sense to use the easiest method possible, which is why many veterinary dentists steer people away from the obvious—the toothbrush—if the dog has not been accustomed to the brush since puppyhood.
- Try dental wipes, especially ones containing the plaque-fighting chemical chlorhexidine gluconate, which destroys the bacteria that cause gum disease. It takes just seconds, and owners should be able to fit it into even the busiest schedule and the smallest mouth.
- For uncooperative pets and for additional protection, there are chews, washes, and diets designed for dental care. Gels that contain sodium hexametaphosphate are particularly effective, because they work by inhibiting the development of plaque.



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The Veterinary Oral Health Council, an organization that analyzes research on dental products for animals, publishes a list of those that meet their criteria for plaque and tartar reduction. The list, as well as the criteria used to judge these products, can be viewed at the VOHC's web site, [vohc.org](http://vohc.org).



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## TERMS OF DENTITION

Here are basic definitions of some words your veterinary dentist may use:

**Calculus or tartar:** hard deposits, often stained yellow or brown, that form on teeth due to inadequate plaque control.

**Gingiva:** soft tissue surrounding the teeth.

**Gingivitis:** inflamed, swollen, and reddish gum tissue that may bleed easily when touched or brushed.

**Periodontitis:** advanced gum



disease in which the inner layer of the gum and bone pull away from the teeth and form pockets and alveolar, or supporting, bone is destroyed. Untreated, it will lead to tooth loss.

**Plaque:** a film composed of food particles mixed with saliva and bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. It is a key factor in the development of dental disease.



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## TIME TO CALL IN THE PROS

When teeth are already covered with brown- and yellow-stained tartar and gums are bleeding or showing signs of inflammation, your dog needs a professional cleaning. But it's important to start brushing again immediately after the dentist has scaled away the tartar and polished the teeth. That's because plaque starts to accumulate within two or three days, so catching it early may delay or eliminate the need for another cleaning down the line.



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### **GO FORTH AND BRUSH!**

But no matter what the method, Dr. Surgeon says that tooth brushing should be on every dog owner's daily agenda. Spend as much time as you can, and for as long as your dog will allow. "It's very important, maybe more so than what I do," he says. "What I do, in terms of removing calculus and plaque is about a third as important as brushing teeth on a daily basis."





THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

### WHO AND WHAT WE ARE:

*The AKC is a not-for-profit organization and the largest purebred dog registry in the world. We are the sports-governing body for over 22,000 dog events a year, including conformation (dog shows) and exciting sports like agility, obedience, rally, tracking, lure coursing, earthdog, herding trials, among others.*



## THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

*But the AKC is so much more! Here are just some of the ways we support and enrich the lives of dogs—purebreds and mixed-breeds alike—and their families. We:*

- Created the [AKC Humane Fund](#), which supports breed rescue activities, assists shelters that permit domestic-abuse victims to bring their pets, and educates dog lovers about responsible dog ownership.
- Offer the [Canine Good Citizen®](#) program: A 10-step test that certifies dogs who have good manners at home and in their community. Over 725,000 dogs across the United States have become Canine Good Citizens, and 42 states have passed resolutions recognizing the program's merit and importance.
- Founded [AKC Reunite](#), which has brought more than 400,000 lost pets back together with their owners.
- Created the [AKC Canine Health Foundation](#), which funds research projects and clinical studies. Since 1995 the AKC has donated over \$24 million to the CHF. (The AKC is the only registry that incorporates health-screening results into its permanent dog records.)
- Conduct thousands of kennel inspections annually to monitor care and conditions at kennels across the country and ensure the integrity of the AKC registry.
- Offer the largest, most comprehensive set of DNA programs for parentage verification and genetic identity to ensure reliable registration records.
- Support one of the world's largest collections of dog-related fine art and artifacts at the [AKC Museum of the Dog](#), and we have the world's largest [dog library](#) at AKC headquarters in New York, both of which are open to the public.



THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

### THANK YOU FOR READING!

*We hope this information was valuable to you in helping your puppy live a long, healthy, happy life. Below, find additional books in our Owner's Manual series designed to strengthen the bond between you and your furry family member.*



THE FIVE COMMANDS  
EVERY DOG SHOULD  
KNOW



CRATE TRAINING



PUPPY FOOD  
& NUTRITION



PUPPY  
SOCIALIZATION



WHY DOES MY DOG DO  
THAT?



WHAT'S HE THINKING?



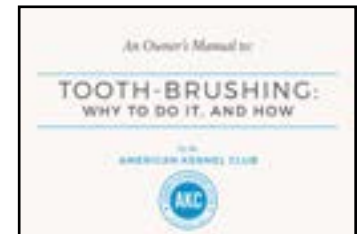
10 ESSENTIAL SKILLS:  
CGC TEST ITEMS



FIVE TRICKS YOU'LL  
WANT TO SHOW OFF



THE ALL-PURPOSE  
GROOMING TOOL KIT



TOOTH-BRUSHING: WHY  
TO DO IT, AND HOW



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR  
PET GOES MISSING



WHAT ARE ALL THESE  
VACCINES?