



St. Michael Veterinary Clinic

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Dental Care for Teething Puppies and Kittens

Puppies and kittens are not born with teeth but develop deciduous (baby) teeth between 4-6 weeks of age. These teeth will be replaced by adult teeth between 3 and 7 months of age. Teething causes sore gums and occasionally irritability to your pet, just like in human babies. Often, this is a major reason that puppies and kittens play bite and chew on things. By massaging the teeth and gums, you will relieve some of the soreness and develop a close bond with your pet. Start slowly in order to gain your pet's trust. Face your pet away from you and put your hands on either side of its head. At first, just handle the muzzle and rub the cheeks over the teeth. Gently push the lips up off the teeth and rub the gums directly. Try short, frequent sessions to get your pet comfortable at first. If your pet struggles, hold them firmly in front of you with your hand over its shoulders (this displays your dominant position to your pet). Do not release the pet while it is struggling, or you will allow it to think he/she can do this to get away with it in the future. As the adult teeth begin to come in, you may notice deciduous teeth loosening and falling out. If the baby teeth remain after the adult come in, we recommend that they be pulled to prevent permanent displacement and future dental problems. When your pet's permanent teeth erupt, it is important to keep them clean and healthy by brushing them every other day. Use a brush designed for pets or soft pediatric toothbrush. Some people find a piece of gauze wrapped around the finger easier to use. Moisten the brush or gauze and pick up a small amount of pet toothpaste. Never use human toothpaste or baking soda, which can foam and frighten your pet. Human toothpaste also contains a detergent which can upset your pet's stomach when swallowed. Brush the outer tooth surfaces back and forth, with special attention to the gum line. Concentrate on cleaning the outside (cheek surfaces) of the teeth, as the tongue helps keep the inside surfaces of the teeth clean. At first, the idea of brushing teeth may seem frivolous, but caring for the teeth is not pampering, it protects against serious problems.

Some Facts:

- 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by age 3
- Dental care may extend your pet's life by up to 20%
- Bad breath indicates dental disease
- Brushing removes plaque (a sticky, colorless, bacteria-laden film)
- Bacteria invade the gum tissue and tooth root
- Bacteria destroy bone that secures teeth that later fall out
- Poor dental care can lead to heart, liver and kidney disease