

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Tips for Brushing a Cat's Teeth

Cats, just like humans, need daily and proper oral care in order to thrive and be happy and healthy in their home. This may seem intimidating initially, but there are steps you can take to help reduce stress for your feline companion before, during, and after a teeth brushing session. You will need either a finger brush or soft bristled cat toothbrush, some cat safe toothpaste, and treats. Never use regular human toothpaste on cats because it can be toxic for them.

We recommend getting your cat used to you handling their teeth and mouth before you start performing daily tooth-brushing sessions. Always begin with a calm cat. Approach them gently and quietly and begin by petting your cat on their favorite spots, and then work your way around to their mouth. Cats typically enjoy having their cheeks rubbed, so rub them around their cheeks and chin, gradually moving towards their lips. Give them treats whenever they lean in or seem receptive to start building a positive association. Although we're not brushing teeth yet, this step is important for building a trusting and rewarding routine with your cat. If your cat is beginning to lean away or resist, end the session and try again later when they're calm again.

When your cat seems to be comfortable with touching around their mouth, gently lift their lip to expose their teeth and gums. Move your hand to touch their lips and slowly run your fingers over their gums and teeth. Once your cat is comfortable with touch and manipulation of the mouth, you can start introducing the toothpaste. You can squeeze a little dab on your finger and place it in front of them, allowing them to sniff. They may lick it or eat it. Cat safe tooth paste is safe for them to eat and can be something that they begin to look forward to if they enjoy the taste. Gently lift their lips and rub the toothpaste onto your cat's teeth in circular motions using your finger. Remember to reward with treats and praise so each session ends on a positive note. Do not be disheartened if this step needs to be repeated several times, days, or maybe even weeks in preparation.

Once your cat is comfortable enough with this stage, it's finally time to introduce the toothbrush! For this step you're going to add the toothpaste and press it gently to your cats' face, always letting it be in her line of vision, and then gently put it under their lips and run it along their teeth and gums. Use a circular motion and focus on the cats gum line. Go slow and gentle to allow for more compliance. Teeth brushing should ideally last about 2-3 minutes total, but it's more important to being able to brush all of your cat's teeth. If you have kept up a slow introduction using positive reinforcement with treats, this step should be much less of a struggle than you may have anticipated.

To ensure success, remember these points! Try to brush your cat's teeth around the same time each day, preferably a time when they're hungry. Cats respond well to routine and rewards. And finally, always be sure to pet, offer play time, and give your cat treats afterwards! Happy brushing!

Resources:

<https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/brushing-teeth-in-cats>

Video of Vet Tutorial: <https://youtu.be/3dBySVcgIYI>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecab.org/>