



Brushing: A Week-by-Week Plan

PETSLIKEMINE
TEETH & MOUTH

The gentle way to teach a dog or cat to accept toothbrushing, one small step at a time

PET NAME	DOG OR CAT	STARTED (DATE)

Almost everyone who tries to brush starts with the brush, meets a struggle, and gives up inside a fortnight. It is not a discipline problem. The trick is to go slower than feels necessary: teach your pet that a finger near the mouth means good things, and only reach for the brush once every earlier step is boringly easy. Brushing is the single most effective thing you can do at home, because plaque re-forms within about a day and hardens into tartar you cannot brush off in around three, so it is frequency, not technique, that wins.

TWO RULES BEFORE YOU START

Never human toothpaste. Your pet cannot spit, so they swallow the fluoride and foaming detergents, and many human pastes contain xylitol, which is toxic to dogs. Use a pet toothpaste in a flavour your pet loves (poultry, beef, malt or fish); the flavour is what turns the job into a treat. **Not on a sore mouth.** Brushing a painful, diseased mouth only teaches your pet to hate it. If the gums look red or the breath is foul, get the mouth checked and treated first, let it heal, and start on a comfortable mouth.

THE RAMP: TICK EACH STEP OFF ONLY WHEN IT IS EASY AND BORING

WEEK 1 Taste the paste	Twice a day, let your pet lick a smear of pet toothpaste off your finger, and make a fuss of them. Do not go near the teeth yet. You are teaching them this flavour means good things. ☐
WEEK 2 Finger on the gums	With a little paste on your finger, gently rub along the outer surfaces of the teeth and gums for a few seconds, then stop and praise. Lift the lip at the big cheek teeth toward the back, where tartar lands first. Build from a couple of seconds up to about fifteen. ☐
WEEK 3 Gauze or finger-brush	Wrap gauze around your finger, or slip on a rubber finger-brush, add paste, and repeat the same gentle rub. The slight texture starts real cleaning while still feeling far less intrusive than bristles. Staying here for good is a genuine win, not a failure. ☐
WEEK 4 The brush	Introduce a soft pet toothbrush. Touch just a few teeth for five to ten seconds the first time, with plenty of paste and praise, and grow the coverage over days. Angle the bristles into the gumline and aim for the outer surfaces of the cheek teeth and canines. ☐

Cats set their own pace: give each step a few days to a couple of weeks, keep every session under a minute, and expect the whole ramp to take anywhere from one week to six. A confident dog may need only a week per step, a wary rescue a month. Both are completely normal, and you are never behind.

THE THREE RULES THAT MAKE IT STICK

- ☐ Watch your pet, not the clock. If they pull away, growl or flinch, you have gone too fast: drop back a step. Every session ends with a treat and a happy pet.
- ☐ Quit while you are ahead. Stop on a good note and they come back willing tomorrow; push for one more tooth and they remember the struggle.
- ☐ You do not need the inside surfaces or the tiny front teeth. The tongue keeps the insides reasonably clean. The outsides of the cheek teeth and canines are the job.

HOW OFTEN, AND FORGIVING THE MISSED DAY

Daily is the gold standard: it never lets plaque reach the three-day point where it turns to tartar. Every other day is nearly as good, and a few times a week beats nothing. Bolt the brush onto something you already do (after dinner, while the kettle boils), keep the kit right there, and if you miss a night, just do tonight. One skipped day is nothing; deciding "I have blown it" is what empties the drawer.

Written and reviewed by Dr Alastair Greenway MRCVS and Claire Greenway BVM&S MRCVS. This sheet explains and records. It does not diagnose or prescribe. Always follow your own vet's instructions.

How to use. Do not try to brush tonight. Get the pet paste out, put a smear on your finger, and let them lick it off while you tell them they are wonderful. That is step one done, and the whole job for today. A wellbeing aid, not a substitute for veterinary advice.

DAILY BRUSHING IS THE REAL PREVENTION; GO SLOWER THAN FEELS NECESSARY