



The At-Home Mouth Check

A calm two-minute look: how to lift the lip, what healthy looks like, and when to book a check

PETSLIKEMINE
TEETH & MOUTH

PET NAME

DOG OR CAT

DATE OF THIS CHECK

A home mouth check is one of the most useful two minutes you can spend on your pet. You are not diagnosing anything. You are learning what your pet's normal mouth looks like, so that when something changes you notice it early, while it is still cheap and simple to fix. Gum disease is sneaky because it is painless at the start: a red gumline you spot this month is a very different problem from a loose, painful tooth you find next year.

HOW TO LOOK WITHOUT A FIGHT (A DOG)

- 1 Pick a calm moment, a flopped-on-the-sofa dog, not a bouncy one. Make a fuss of them first.
- 2 Rest one hand gently over the top of the muzzle. You do not open the mouth: lips closed, jaw shut, you are just peeling back the curtain.
- 3 Use a thumb or finger to lift the upper lip up and back, exposing the gums and the big side teeth. Look along the gumline, then work back toward the large cheek teeth, where trouble shows first.
- 4 Have a quick sniff while you are there. Breath tells you a lot.
- 5 Praise, treat, done. Two minutes, tops. A fortnightly look is plenty.

Cats are not small dogs about this. Keep it shorter and gentler and quit before they have had enough: a scratch behind the ears, a one-second peek at the gumline, then straight back to the fuss and a treat. If they will not allow it, do not force it, and watch instead for dribbling, eating on one side or pawing at the face. You only ever need the outside of the teeth.

WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING AT

- **Healthy.** Gums a clean salmon or bubblegum pink (some pets have naturally black-pigmented gums, which is normal), with a crisp, calm edge sitting neatly against the tooth. Teeth white to cream and smooth. No real smell.
- **Book a check.** A red or swollen rim along the gumline (this is gingivitis, the early, reversible stage, and the most useful thing you can catch). Brown or yellow crust (tartar) on the teeth. Gums that bleed easily or are pulling back from the teeth. A broken tooth, or one gone grey, purple or brown, or with a dark or pink spot in the middle. Persistent bad breath.
- **Ring the vet today.** A facial swelling below the eye, a mouth that is actively bleeding, or a pet who has suddenly stopped eating. An angry red, cobblestoned area at the very back of the mouth, especially in a cat, can be feline stomatitis and needs veterinary care. Gums that look starkly white, blue, brick-red or yellow are a whole-body warning, not a dental one, and mean a same-day call.

PLEASE DON'T SCRAPE IT YOURSELF

The tartar you can see is bonded hard to the tooth. Dragging a metal scaler across it scratches the enamel, cuts the gum of a wriggling, awake pet, and only ever reaches the visible crown, never the disease under the gumline that is the real problem. It leaves a tooth that looks cleaner and a mouth no healthier. Leave scaling to the professionals.

THIS IS TRIAGE, NOT DIAGNOSIS

Most of the disease that causes pain and tooth loss happens below the gumline, in the roots and bone, out of sight. You cannot see it by lifting a lip, and neither can your vet in the consulting room, which is why a proper dental needs x-rays and probing while your pet is asleep. A tidy-looking mouth at home is reassuring, but not a guarantee: the home check catches the visible warning signs early and tells you when to get a professional involved.

WHAT I NOTICED THIS TIME (BRING TO YOUR VET)

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. Have your two-minute look while your pet is relaxed and learn what their normal is. If it is all pink and clean, note it and look again in a fortnight. If you spot anything amber or red above, book a check. A wellbeing aid, not a substitute for veterinary advice.

THE MOUTH HIDES DISEASE BELOW THE GUMLINE; A HOME LOOK IS TRIAGE, NOT DIAGNOSIS