

Points on Pets: Don't give dental health the brush-off

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: What can we do to prevent our new 10-week-old puppy's teeth from becoming discolored as he matures? Our previous dog had very yellowed teeth and just before she died her breath was really bad smelling. We want to avoid this if possible in our new family member. Is it possible to brush our dog's teeth? We have heard that canine toothpastes have been developed and are being used by many dog owners throughout the United States.

A: It is great that you are concerned about your new puppy's long-term dental health care now. Although almost all dogs develop some form of dental disease within the first few years of life, much can be done to lessen the severity and delay the onset of problems through well-designed wellness programs.

Because of all of the excitement generated by getting a new puppy and the concentration required to housebreak and properly socialize the new family member, routine health care is often overlooked until significant problems occur. Of course, preventive health care now is much better than treating preventable problems as your canine family member ages.

A well-planned home dental care program including proper nutrition and daily brushing will pay big dividends in the future. Most dogs, especially puppies, can be easily trained to allow regular tooth-brushing. One method to initially introduce your new puppy to routine brushing is to simply rub your finger over the puppy's teeth and gums after dipping it into a warm bouillon broth. Early training sessions should be short in length and very positive. Your puppy should enjoy having his teeth rubbed.

Gradually you can introduce gauze over your finger and gently scrub the teeth with a circular motion. After you have successfully done this several times, you can introduce a soft toothbrush designed for dogs or a finger cot with a brush surface. These can be bought at most veterinary clinics and at most pet stores. Only toothpaste designed specifically for dogs should be used.

Brushing your dog's teeth regularly will not only help avoid dental problems, but will also help you develop a strong bond. Most dogs actually enjoy having their teeth brushed, especially if a flavored toothpaste is used.

Feeding a high-quality commercially prepared dog food and providing properly designed chew toys will also help prevent dental problems.

You should consult your veterinarian regarding a complete wellness program for your new family member.

Q: We are really worried that our little mixed breed dog might be pregnant. Because she is very small, we do not want her to have puppies. What can we do? Can we have an abortion performed? We are really sick worrying about her and we are really depressed knowing that it was our negligence that allowed this to occur. Please help us!

A: You should have your dog examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible. Unwanted pregnancies can usually be safely terminated in most dogs. Depending on the length of the pregnancy, your veterinarian might simply recommend that you have your dog spayed. This, of course, would end the current pregnancy and would prevent your dog from having future unwanted puppies.

Pet owners who does not want their animals to have offspring should have them spayed as soon as recommended by their veterinarians. The problem of having thousands of unwanted dogs and cats that must be euthanized in the United States each year can be prevented.

Write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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