



## Veterinary Specialty of the Day:

### Dentistry

Some veterinarians undergo further training to specialize in a specific field of medicine. Veterinary dentists focus on treating diseases and conditions that affect an animal's teeth and gums. Veterinary dentists can perform a variety of dental procedures, from regular tooth cleanings to root canals to even tooth extractions.

### Discussion Questions

- Have you ever been to the dentist? What was it like?
- Why is it important to brush our teeth?

## Veterinary dentists are trained to...



#### Provide Dental Cleanings

Pets are put under anesthesia so the veterinary dentist can safely clean the teeth, including underneath the gums. X-rays are taken to identify any problems beneath the gum-line.



#### Repair Fractures

Veterinary dentists are trained to treat fractures (breaks) in teeth and the jaw bone.



#### Treat Periodontal Disease

Periodontal disease is the most common disease in dogs. It occurs when bacteria accumulates on teeth and under gums, causing bone and gum loss.



#### Perform Tooth Restorations

To protect broken teeth, veterinary dentists place crowns that act as armor around a tooth's outer surface. Crowns are made to withstand daily chewing.

## All About Teeth



Adult dogs have 42 permanent teeth while adult cats only have 30 permanent teeth. Humans, in comparison, have 32 permanent teeth as adults.

Cats and dogs lose their baby teeth too! These are known as deciduous teeth, or milk teeth. You can approximate a puppy or kitten's age based on the amount of baby teeth they have.



Like humans, cats and dogs have four types of teeth: incisors, canines, premolars, and molars.

Incisors are the front teeth. Canines are behind the incisors and are pointed teeth that can puncture. Premolars and molars are behind the canines and help to cut and grind food. Unlike humans, cats and dogs have special molars called carnassial teeth which help them to shear their food.



Cats and dogs need to have their teeth brushed too! Their teeth should be brushed daily using a pet toothpaste and soft-bristled toothbrush.

Bad breath isn't normal and may be a sign of periodontal disease. Regular dental cleanings can help spot periodontal disease or other possible conditions a pet may have.

### Reference:

[Homecare guidelines for maintenance of oral health for dogs and cats.](#) Animal Medical Center  
Perrone, Jeanne. [Tighten your dentistry knowledge \(Proceedings\).](#) DVM360 (2008)

## Activities



### 1<sup>st</sup> Grade & Up

#### Dental Cleaning Activity

*Materials: small rocks/stones, clay, paint, paintbrushes, clay scraper tools or toothpicks*

- You can simulate a dental cleaning using arts & craft supplies.
- The small rocks/stones will represent "teeth". Have your child rub a thin layer of clay on the outer surface of the rocks.
- Once the clay has hardened, it can be painted a yellow/orange/light brown color similar to the color of plaque.
- Using a clay scraper tool or a toothpick, have your child "clean" the teeth by carefully scraping the clay off of the rocks while being careful not to nick the "tooth" underneath.

#### Dental Observations

*Materials: human food, pet food, dental charts, crayons/markers/colored pencils*

- Ask your child if all of their teeth are the same shape. No, of course not! Teeth have different shapes because they have different jobs. Many pets (but not all) have differently shaped teeth as well.
- You can find and print out dental charts online for both humans and pets. Have your child color in teeth in the same category, such as incisors, canines, premolars, and molars.
- Have your child pay careful attention to which teeth they are using the next time they eat. Are they using their incisors to take a bite? Are they using their molars to chew?
- Have your child watch the family pet as they eat. What teeth are they using and for what type of food? Does their pet use their teeth for playing, and if so, how?

## Activities



### 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> Grades

#### Career Exploration: Veterinary Dentists

*Materials: computer/tablet/phone with internet access*

- The field of veterinary medicine is huge and there are many job opportunities available to those interested in pursuing a career in the field.
- If your child is interested in a career in veterinary dentistry, encourage them to research the various job opportunities and programs that exist.
- Need a place to start? Check out this link to the American Veterinary Dental College on the job of a veterinary dental specialist: <https://avdc.org/animal-owner-resources/>