

Our dogs experience the world primarily through their nose, not their eyes. To keep their sense of smell optimal, good oral hygiene is important. From this photo, you can see how the roots of the teeth are in close proximity to the nasal passages and the cribriform bones that are covered with mucous membranes bearing the scent-receptor cells, and why dental disease can affect smell.

There are multiple things we can do to slow down the development of plaque and tartar – though the information below is simply a guide, and should not be used in place of proper veterinary care.

All of the agents used to help prevent dental disease work best when started when the teeth are a “clean slate,” either as a puppy or after professional cleaning as an adult dog. The products described in this link http://vohc.org/VOHCAcceptedProductsTable_Dogs.pdf and described below have been approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC.org), having been shown in clinical trials to be of benefit. Note that “veterinarian approved” on a product label does NOT mean that the product has been tested in clinical trials and shown to be effective.



1. “Dental” dog kibble – available by prescription through a veterinarian only, these foods are of a size and consistency designed to help “brush” the teeth.
2. Water additives – A number are available; Healthy Mouth comes highly recommended to reduce plaque formation. If you go their website, you can see photo results of the clinical trials done on greyhounds by Dr. Jean Dobbs (go to “Our products” then “Clinical trials). The active ingredients are papain and zinc gluconate with a host of breath-freshening agents. My veterinary dentist tells me that most dogs don’t like this product, but will adapt if started in a very dilute concentration. It comes in a number of flavors, smells of cinnamon, and colors the water green. Oso, however, never made it past a 1:2 dilution of the Kobe beef flavor when he refused to drink it and decided to drink water from the shower and started looking around the house for open toilets. To me (it’s human food grade), it smells of cinnamon and has only a slightly alkaline taste. There are several other plaque-reducing water additives, gels and sprays, and only one gel that reduces tartar. Check which ones have the VOCH seal of approval.
3. Food additive – Pro-Den Plaque-Off powder added to food daily – makes the tartar softer and more amenable to removal by chewing and brushing. Treats – pro den plaque off system dental care bones earn a 5-star rating from Oso – a one-a-day treat – available on Amazon.com. Many others are suggested on the VOCH website. The abrasive action of chewing is the key to plaque & tartar removal. Daily Bouvier-sized dose of Pro-den Plaque-Off and daily dental bone.
4. BRUSHING! This is the most important part of good dental hygiene for your dog. Dr. Chris Zink has a YouTube video on how to brush your dog’s teeth. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubHjj7kb5gY&t=53s> Unfortunately, her demo dog is a Norwich terrier.