

I am fascinated with canine nutrition. This probably has something to do with my personal love of food and the fact that I am a foodie. When a fellow Great Pyrenees owner sent me a news clip concerning the dangers of certain chew treats I went on a mission to learn more about the treats we give our dogs. My first stop was to speak to Dr. Walter Rowntree, DVM. That conversation made me realize that others may find this same information interesting and useful, so I asked Dr. Rowntree to write-up what we had just talked about (see the “Perils and Pitfalls of Canine Dental Hygiene” below).

Related to this same topic I have added a section describing some of my most recent canine research and that is the nutritional effect of treats (see “How are we Treat-ing our Dogs” (sidebar)). – Keith T. Weber

## Perils and Pitfalls of Canine Dental Hygiene

(Or, how to maintain healthy gums without killing your dog)

Walter Rowntree, DVM

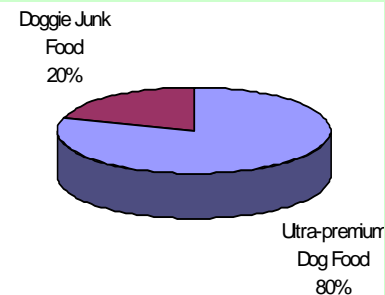
When I was practicing in Montana, a man brought in his 11 year-old miniature Schnauzer for vaccines. As usual, I started with an examination of the dog’s oral cavity. Well, I practically called the guy a liar because his dog didn’t have any dental disease. None! His teeth and gums looked like they belonged in a 7 month-old dog’s mouth. I had never seen such a thing in an 11 year-old mouth, especially considering that small breed dogs tend to develop gingivitis and periodontitis at an earlier age than larger breeds. I asked the guy about it and he said, “Doc, I have brushed this dog’s teeth twice a day since he was six weeks old.” That made a huge impression on me, so I started brushing my dogs’ teeth that night. I had three dogs at the time. That’s 252 teeth I was brushing every day. That’s a lot of teeth. I stopped after three months as I realized I had stopped brushing my own teeth. So if you really want to keep your dog’s gums healthy, start brushing when he has NO dental disease (i.e. when he is *young*).

Why? After 24 hours the protein film on teeth turns to plaque, which does not brush off! Human dentists tell us that if you brush less than twice daily, you are wasting your time. Twice a week does no good. Either brush twice daily or not at all. But if you don’t want to brush your dog’s teeth twice daily I’m not going to think less of you. I tried it myself and couldn’t keep it up. The dentists also tell us that to really do the most good we need to brush for 3 full minutes. That’s five minutes in dog time --more teeth – more brushing. You can’t do a *quickie* brushing job and expect it to do any good. You’d be better off playing with him for 60 seconds more a day than

### How are we Treat-ing our Dogs?

Treats can be categorized into three general groups a) crunchy biscuits b) chewy snacks, and c) dental treats. While the main article deals strictly with a variety of dental treats, this section deals with all three treat types and focuses on their nutritional impact.

Did you know that a single regular size dog biscuit contains about 40 Calories? To put this into perspective, the energy requirement for a 50lb adult dog is between 1200 and 1500 Calories. Given a handful of treats throughout the day our dogs could be consuming 20% of their daily diet from doggie junk-food!



brushing for only one minute.

What's the alternative? Well, the natural way that a dog brushes his teeth and keeps his gums healthy is by chewing. For 30 minutes a day he should chew on something. Bones, shoes, digital cameras – it probably doesn't matter what, as far as maintaining healthy gums is concerned. There's a downside for the rest of the body, though. Here are some potential problems to bear in mind:

- If the dental treat is too hard, an occasional dog will crack a tooth. This happens most often with large breed dogs chewing marrow bones.
- If the dental treat splinters, bits of it can get shoved under the gum or between the teeth, promoting infection (Which is what we're trying to avoid in the first place).
- If enough pieces are swallowed, or one piece of "just the right size" is swallowed, an intestinal blockage may result.

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***Let him know you're happy he's brushing his own teeth without having to be told.***

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The classic example of this last problem is with a rawhide dental treat. They're made for dogs to chew on, and you'd think they'd be safe. But many dogs chew bits of them off until just the end is left, and down it goes, whole. Or, a dog will chew and chew and chew until it's gone, and then all the pieces swell up inside and you have the same result: an expensive surgery --albeit on a dog with healthy gums— to remedy an intestinal blockage.

My recommendation: Individualize your choice of dental treat/chew toy for your dog's chewing preferences and habits.

1. Go to Petco or M<sup>c</sup>Kee's and buy \$75.00 of dental treats for your dog...all different kinds. Try Greenies<sup>TM</sup>, rawhides, large raw leg bones, Nylabones<sup>TM</sup>, rubber chew toys, rope chew toys, squeaky toys, and anything else they have. Most of these won't appeal and will end up being a waste of money, *but* compared to the cost of a dental cleaning under anesthesia, it's cheap! *Note: Never give your dog cooked bones. The cooking process softens the bone so that the dog can chew pieces off of it. Many dogs like chewing up sticks, and the fibrous nature probably makes for efficient 'brushing', but there's the splinter problem. The biggest impediment is, perhaps, finding something safe your dog wants to chew on. Smaller breeds especially seem less inclined to chew for their own entertainment.*
2. Determine which item(s) your dog is willing to chew.
3. Watch how he uses the dental treat. Ideally, he should chew it for ½ hour a day, every day. If an occasional small, *non-pointy* bit comes off and is swallowed, no big deal. If he chews it to the nub in the first hour – or worse, swallows the nub – it's not an appropriate product for that dog. Try something else.
4. Encourage your dog to spend time chewing every day. This can be as simple as "suggesting" to your dog that he go chew if he's feeling bored, perhaps by pulling on the other end of his rope toy until he's interested in taking off into the corner and having his way with it. Never act annoyed at your dog's chewing, not even if the noise is keeping you awake at night or he's drooling all over the couch. When you catch your dog chewing on his own, praise him. Let him know you're happy he's brushing his own teeth without having to be told.