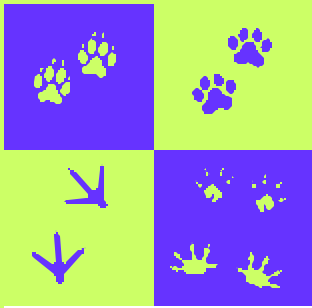


Paws for Pets



Blending of Families, A Challenge for Pets Too

By Deb Wood

People with stepchildren know that they can make life more complicated, as well as more rewarding. Step-pets provide some of the same challenges.

Here is some advice to consider if the man or woman of your dreams is accompanied by the pitter-patter of little paws.

Don't go too fast. "Don't put dogs and other pets through a lot of changes until you're sure that you want to go ahead in the relationship," says New York psychologist Joel Gavriele-Gold, author of "When Pets Come Between Partners: How to Keep Love -- and Romance -- in the Human/Animal Kingdom of Your House" (John Wiley & Sons, \$14.95, 256 pages). Introduce pets to your new love gradually, and make lifestyle changes slowly.

Discuss issues of discipline and training. "The biggest issue that I see is when one partner views the pet as a child, and the other partner sees the pet as just an animal," says Kali Miller, a licensed psychologist in Portland. That difference in perspective also can lead to arguments over how pets are disciplined and what behaviors are acceptable. One partner might find it a bonding experience to share some bites of supper with the pet, while another might find it horrifying.

Both Miller and Gavriele-Gold recommend that couples talk about what discipline was like for humans and pets in their childhood homes, and to come to an agreement about pet behavior in their blended home. "Be open to coaching, and ask, 'How are we going to do this together?'" Miller says. Until you have this agreement, don't discipline your partner's pet. Don't blame your partner for normal animal interactions. "It's not your partner's fault that his cat ends up top cat or your lap-cat never comes out from under the bed," says Tanya Roberts, the Oregon Humane Society's training and behavior supervisor. It's normal for animals to sort out their own hierarchy; this has nothing to do with which animal is "best" or with

your relationship with your new partner.

Figure out routines that work for all the pets.

As challenging as stepchildren may be, you never have to worry about them eating each other. But if you love your pet rat, and your intended loves his Jack Russell terrier, you might have some serious planning to do.

Keep animals separate until you are sure they are safe with each other. Even friendly, compatible dogs may need some transition time. "You might need to look at spaying or neutering one or both," says Suzanne Malick, an owner of Pup-A-Razzi in Beaverton. "You may need to look at behavior modification, especially if one of them has been used to ruling the roost."

Animals with territory issues probably will do best if they all move in to a new place, rather than moving into the space that one animal already claims as his own.

Sometimes, a session or two with a knowledgeable trainer or behaviorist can improve your domestic harmony -- and is probably cheaper than a marriage counselor.

Give it time and patience. Set aside time for your pet and for your partner's. "This is a time that the animals need more reassurance, more structure, more exercise," Roberts says. "Stop for five minutes, hold them, and acknowledge the fact that this is hard on them, too."

Develop routines with your partner's pet, such as feeding the cat, playing a special game or taking the dog for walks.

Transitions are hard, and it's difficult because you want the animals and humans to all love each other. "What it takes is time and patience," Roberts says. "Try to relax about it. It can be done."



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Teaching Puppies Not to Bite

A puppy likes biting and chewing on almost anything that enters its world. Just as with jumping, biting between littermates is their style of play. Biting also teaches them how to use their main hunting tool, their teeth. Unfortunately, this behavior often carries over into their interactions with the members of their new home.

Puppies have very sharp teeth and a bite or nip can hurt. Along with inflicting pain, a dog bite can be terrifying to small children.

There are several methods that are used to eliminate this unwanted behavior.

Holding the Mouth Shut

The simplest method for handling this behavior is to very, very quickly grab the puppy's mouths and hold it shut. While holding the mouth shut, say a single, stern "No" in a low tone. Holding the mouth closed is usually done by placing the thumb over the top of the puppy's nose and the fingers below the bottom of the jaw.

Holding the mouth closed for 4 to 5 seconds is sufficient and the puppy usually whines. Don't try to cause them pain; there is no need to firmly squeeze the mouth. After releasing the puppy's mouth, don't make any further fuss but go on with whatever you were doing.

It will take a few sessions for the puppy to catch on, but the animal will soon put together the facts that the bite instantly causes his mouth to be held shut.

It's not recommended to bring children into this form of discipline. Children can get hurt or they can hurt the puppy.

Spaying or Neutering Brings Health Benefits to Pets

MANHATTAN -- Spaying or neutering pets is a common procedure and most pet owners have probably had some experience with having the procedure done on animals they have owned.

According to Dr. Kathy Gaughan, clinical instructor at Kansas State University's Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, many people may not know, though, that there are medical advantages to spaying or neutering pets.

"The direct health benefits of spaying or neutering are significant for the pet," Gaughan said. "If female pets are spayed before their first heat cycle, the risk of developing mammary tumors (breast cancer) is significantly reduced.

"Spaying female pets eliminates the risk of pyometra, an infection of the uterus," Gaughan said. "This disease can be very serious in female pets. Male pets can benefit, too," Gaughan said. "Neutering eliminates the risk of testicular cancer and reduces the risk of prostate disease.

"Spaying or neutering can help prolong a pet's life in a secondary way as well," Gaughan added. "When pets are spayed or neutered, their tendencies to roam or fight are greatly lessened. This prevents the pets

Startle Response and Redirection

As soon as the puppy bites down, make a sudden, abrupt, high-pitched, loud "Yelp" sound. This imitates the sound that a littermate would make if bitten by the puppy. This sound should be so sudden and sharp that the puppy is immediately startled and stops the behavior. If done correctly, the puppy immediately removes his mouth and looks bewildered. At that point, quickly substitute a toy (such as a ball) for the puppy to chew on.



This method redirects the puppy's biting behavior to the ball. The puppy learns that it is not fun to bite, however, chewing the toy is ok. It may be necessary to repeat this process several times during the puppy's play period. If the "Yelps" make the puppy more excited, it's best to try another approach.

Stop the Action Immediately (and dramatically) leave the room when the puppy bites. This is certainly a method children can use. After multiple times the puppy will learn that every time she bites she loses her playmate, and that's no fun at all.

Important! No matter what method you use, do not entice the puppy to bite you. Games like tug-of-war and waving your hands in front of the puppy may encourage him (or her) to bite.

from getting lost, stolen, hit by cars or contracting a disease."

Cats that fight can contract a serious disease called feline leukemia. This disease, which affects the bone marrow and breaks down the immune system of the cat, can be passed from feline to feline through saliva or blood. Cats also run the risk of contracting feline immune deficiency virus when they fight. This disease is very similar to HIV: It can lie dormant in the cat for quite a while, and it breaks down the immune system of the cat.

Spaying or neutering dogs can help keep them under control. Dogs that have not been spayed or neutered are more likely to run away from home. While running loose, they have a chance of being hit by a car, getting lost or taken to the animal shelter.

"I would advise pet owners to have their pets spayed or neutered. The medical advantages have been proven, and serious complications to the procedure are uncommon," Gaughan said. "Pets recover from surgery very quickly," Gaughan said. "Usually the day after surgery, most pets are bouncing around as if nothing ever happened." The cost of the procedure varies depending on the species and sex of the pet, but it is relatively inexpensive.

Feline Dental Health

Feline Dental Health

Feline dental health and the proper care of cat teeth are often overlooked by cat owners when they think of cat health care. Yet caring for cat teeth is the easiest way to prevent a large number of potential problems, including heart, liver and kidney problems.

Plaque, tartar and gingivitis can weaken cat teeth over time, leading to loose teeth, broken teeth and tooth loss. Even one broken tooth or exposed root surfaces can cause your cat pain when eating or drinking. Your veterinarian should be consulted for treatment options.

Cat Health Care and Oral Hygiene

Brushing cat teeth is best started when the cat is still young, but don't presume your older cat won't learn to accept the concept. Cat toothpaste is designed to be tasty, so if you're lucky, he'll see brushing as a pleasurable activity.

Choosing healthy cat treats and feeding cat food designed to address dental health, along with regular veterinary examination, is the best strategy for ensuring your cat's pretty smile.

The Benefits of Cat Dental Care

Want to be proactive about your cat's health? Take care of those cat teeth. Tooth decay, broken teeth and abscesses can affect a cat's ability to feed itself. Bacteria in the mouth can spread to major organs through the bloodstream. By following a cat dental care program you may be avoiding heart, lung and kidney problems.

Feline Dental Care and the Internal Organs
Keeping your cat's teeth clean and healthy may have far-reaching consequences, especially as they age. It's normal for a cat's mouth to contain bacteria, but gingivitis can result when plaque and tartar accumulate and the accompanying bacteria infects the cat's mouth.

Studies have shown that bacteria can travel from the mouth through the bloodstream and infect the heart and other internal organs. A geriatric cat's heart, kidney and other organs typically lose some ability to function with age, and bacteria from the mouth can add to this deterioration. Maintaining healthy teeth and gums helps maintain a healthy body.

Putting Things In Perspective

If you're not convinced that cat health care should include a cat dental plan, consider this. A three-year-old cat's age is about equivalent to that of a twenty-year-old human's. Imagine twenty years of never brushing your teeth. Twenty years without any dental checkups or dental work done on problems.

Cat Dental Warning!

If you've got the sudden urge to brush cat teeth (and who doesn't?), make sure you use *cat toothpaste*. Ordinary toothpaste isn't healthy for felines to swallow (since you're unlikely to be successful in teaching her to spit) and besides, I doubt they'd like the taste much!

Cat Health Care and Cat Teeth

There are thirty sharp, well-designed cat teeth in the mouth of every adult domestic cat—or at least, there are if proper cat dental care is being followed. Preventive cat health care has to include the mouth, gums, and teeth, because problems with cat teeth can have far-reaching consequences.

Gum infections and other cat dental problems encourage the growth of bacteria that spread through the bloodstream. Kidney problems, heart disorders and infections in other parts of the body can all start in the mouth.

Keeping Cat Teeth Clean

How do you care for cat dental needs? Fortunately, it's pretty easy to incorporate at-home dental exams into your cat health care program. Pet owners can spot many potential problems easily with just a little practice, and that's exactly the point of this site. Here you'll find out what to look for when you pry Fluffy's mouth open. And to that point, you'll find out how to get Fluffy's mouth open without losing fingers!

You'll also learn what veterinary steps should be taken to address certain problems. Day-to-day cat dental care can be done at home, but some problems require a vet's special care. At home, you can help your cat maintain healthy teeth by periodic brushings.

Plaque and Tartar: Constant Problems

Cat dental care is essentially a constant battle against plaque and tartar buildup, just as it is in humans. Plaque is an invisible film that builds back up on teeth within twenty minutes of a professional cleaning. **T a r t a r i s m i n e r a l i z e d p l a q u e .**

One of the goals of your regime of cat health care should be to slow this process down. You can do this by both regular brushing and by examining the teeth for plaque and tartar buildup to see if professional intervention is necessary.

What to Look For

Plaque and tartar are visible as yellow and brown deposits on the teeth. Plaque accumulates over the teeth and tartar is often most visible at the gum line. Regular cleaning with a toothbrush and toothpaste designed for cat health care can slow down deposit build-up. Pay special attention to the gum line—an area that the toothbrush can't always clean adequately. Plaque and tartar at the gum line indicates that it's time for a professional cleaning.

Cat Food and Dental Care

When it comes to cleaning teeth, dry cat food is best. Wet food doesn't provide the abrasion that dry food does. Dry, crunchy food can scrape plaque deposits off as the cat eats, to some degree.

Recently, cat food companies have developed tooth-cleaning cat food—food that is specially formulated to promote healthy teeth. The

Feline Dental Health...continued

Abrasive Dry Cat Food



food is abrasive enough that it scrapes tartar and plaque off the teeth, and some products even leave small crystals embedded in the plaque that work to break down plaque even when the cat isn't eating.

The science of dental care and cat food is just beginning to reach pet food stores. Only time will tell how efficient such products actually are. While they may prove to be a valuable ally in the war against plaque and tartar, regular brushing and inspection remain the most efficient of techniques for healthy, clean feline teeth.

Cat Gingivitis and Tartar

Cat gingivitis is one of the 'silent' cat health care problems. Gingivitis is inflammation of the gums caused by plaque and tartar accumulation. The disease progresses slowly, so it's very easy to overlook cat gingivitis until it is advanced and the gums have receded.

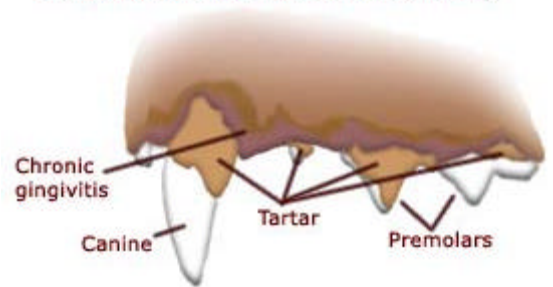
At-home cleaning alone cannot fight cat gingivitis because much of the tartar lies either at or below the gum line. To be effectively controlled, a cat health care professional should periodically examine and clean the entire tooth surface while the cat is under anesthetic.

Stages of Gingivitis

Gingivitis starts out slowly, with minor inflammation of the gum line itself. If regular cleaning of the teeth is neglected, the inflammation slowly spreads deeper into the gums, attacking the tissues that support the teeth.

Advanced gingivitis can lead to loose teeth and inflamed pockets around the teeth. As the gum line recedes, the nerve roots of the teeth are exposed, leading to increased pain sensitivity when eating. Without intervention, gingivitis can even eat away at the bone underneath the teeth.

Gingivitis and Feline Dental Anatomy



How Serious is Advanced Cat Gingivitis?

Gingivitis can lead to serious cat health care problems. At advanced stages, up to 50% of the tissues attaching the cat's teeth to its jaws can be lost. Gingivitis can cause tooth loss and great discomfort to cats suffering from its effects. Anyone who's ever suffered from exposed dental nerve endings knows how very painful the problem can become. There's also the very real danger that the bacteria causing the gums to deteriorate will also spread to other areas of the body.

Prevention: Regular Dental Cleaning

Brushing is the first line of defense against gingivitis, and is quite effective against the early stages. To effectively control gingivitis, however, a professional tooth cleaning is required. With the cat under anesthetic, the vet can clean the tartar that hides beneath the gum line.

Examining Cat Teeth

Okay, before we discuss what you should look for in your cat's mouth, let's discuss *opening the mouth*. Anyone who's ever tried to pill a cat will attest that getting kitty to open wide isn't easy. But if you're conducting a feline dental health exam, the cat *must* open up.

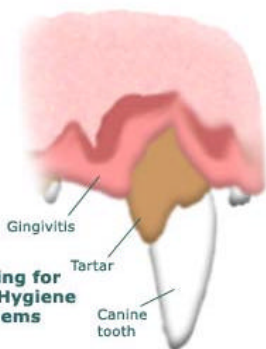
To get a good look at your cat's teeth, hold the head gently but firmly from above. Use your index finger and thumb to gently pry open the jaw. Do this slowly and keep talking in a soothing voice: it's a rare cat who likes this treatment.

When you're through, praise her and give her a treat (the kitty equivalent of the lollipop kids used to get at the dentist's). If she learns that there's a pay-off at the end of this indignity, she's more likely to sit still for it.

What to Look For

You've got the cat's jaw open, and she's starting to squirm. Now is not the time to wonder what you should be looking for! You should check the teeth: are they white, or yellowing? Yellowing indicates a need for dental care. Look for accumulation of tartar on any of the teeth. Check for any broken or badly discolored teeth. Are the gums a healthy pink, or an angry red? While you're there, look for open sores or odd growths in the mouth—they may indicate tumors or ulcers.

Looking for Oral Hygiene Problems



Finally, smell the cat's breath. Is it fresh and pleasant, or did the stench make you dizzy? Bad breath may just indicate heavy plaque build-up, but it can also be a sign of kidney problems. If you avoid kissing your cat be-

Feline Dental Health...continued

cause of her breath, consider taking her to your vet for a check-up.

Cat Teeth: Health and Prevention

Of all the odd cat health questions I've ever taken to my vet, asking how to brush my cat's teeth must top the list. Not that it's really so odd: when you consider cat teeth, health and maintenance go hand in hand. I'd just never realized I would play such a fundamental role in my cat's dental hygiene. So, without further ado, the answer to that most perplexing of cat health questions: How to I brush the teeth of an animal that's composed of fangs, claws, and a low tolerance for human stupidity?

Sneaky Dental Care

The best advice on brushing a cat's teeth? Get them started while they're young. Kittens are much more adaptable than older cats, and are likely to take to brushing as just another part of the grooming schedule. With older cats, you have to introduce the idea gradually.

Start off by letting them play with the toothbrush. Hold it in your hand and gently tickle them around the jaw with it. That way, you're getting their scent on the brush, making it familiar and part of their territory.

Now, once they're used to the toothbrush, put some toothpaste on it, and let them lick it off while you hold the brush. If they don't like the taste, try a different brand. As they come to associate the brush with a treat, slowly start brushing their teeth as they try to lick the paste. Be patient, and don't rush the process.

Non-Anesthetic Cleaning

The cat owner, as part of an at-home cat dental care plan, performs most non-anesthetic cleaning of a cat's teeth. Regular brushing, toys designed to scrape at plaque, and dental foods are all part of a good cleaning program.

But there are some areas of the mouth that an owner can't clean. These areas have to be cleaned by qualified veterinarians, and require that the cat be anesthetized while the cleaning takes place. X-rays, of teeth, tooth extraction and medical treatment of abscesses also require anesthetic. Simply chipping off accumulated tartar should not be confused with total dental cleaning.

The Ideal Scenario

If our cats lived in a perfect world, once a year they would go to the vet's for a dental cleaning. Under anesthetic, the vet would scrape the tartar and plaque off the teeth at the gum line, down where the toothbrush can't reach. Polishing the cleaned surface is another important part of cat dental care. Between yearly visits owners would maintain a regular dental cleaning schedule. Cats would have wonderful, healthy mouths and teeth.

The Grim Reality

What stops most people from embarking on yearly dental cleanings? In one word: money. Professional cat dental care is an added expense, and most owners are understandably hesitant to add this expense onto their yearly pet care costs. Most vets take a very pragmatic approach. Dental care is *not* a frivolous "extra." Chances are, if your vet recommends dental care, he's not suggesting it lightly.

All this means that at-home cat dental care is very important and regular brushing can prolong the time periods between professional cleanings.

Kiss the Cat: Bad Breath and Health

Snuggle up to your cat. Bring her face up to yours. Bring her mouth close to your nose and take a deep breath. Do you smell pleasant, sweet breath, or did you just pass out from the stench? If so, you've just become a victim of *Cat Bad Breath*. Now, before you go running to the pet store for the kitty equivalent of mouthwash, you should know that bad breath can indicate some pretty serious health concerns.

So, just what can bad breath indicate? Well, it might just suggest that you fed her tuna immediately before you checked her breath. (In other words, don't check your cat's breath immediately after she's eaten canned food—Phew!)

A bad odor may indicate that the cat has some dental problems that should be attended to. These could be anything from minor gingivitis to advanced gum disease. Infections in and around the teeth and gums, often from tartar accumulation, are probably a leading cause of pet bad breath. Hopefully, all that your cat's bad breath indicates is a need for some routine dental care and then a regular program of home maintenance.

Getting Serious: Cat Kidney Failure and Other Problems

Bad breath can, unfortunately, indicate much more serious health concerns. Burped up gas can point to a number of stomach and metabolic problems. One of the more serious possibilities is kidney failure. While most of us think of this in terms of the other end of the cat, urinary health, including kidney disease, can be indicated by unpleasant breath.

The toxins normally eliminated by the kidneys build up in the blood stream and are detectable in the breath. Many veterinary experts believe that

Feline Dental Health...continued

bacteria from the mouth gain access to the blood stream through diseased gums, resulting in bacteria being deposited in vital organs such as the heart and kidneys. For a cat, bad breath is reason enough for a trip to the vet's to rule out any serious conditions.

Older Cat Health and Routine Dental Care

Good dental care, important as it is at all ages, is of special concern when discussing older cat health. Dental problems such as tartar buildup and severe gingivitis, or gum disease, are seen more commonly in the older cat, simply because the condition has more time to develop. Health problems may show up as broken teeth or abscesses. (A quick check: does your cat shake its head or express pain when eating or drinking? It may be a sign of dental problems.)

What's the best way to prevent gingivitis and other dental problems in older cats? Regular dental care throughout the cat's life. This includes both veterinary dental cleanings performed on a yearly basis to remove tartar build-up and regular, at-home dental care. Yes, there is a price for your cat's pearly whites: more frequent veterinary attention. But the cost is minimal, given the overall health impact on your cat. You can actively help in your cat's dental hygiene program by providing a good cat healthcare program of brushing and proper food selection. Like most health care issues, preventive measures are always preferable to emergency treatment to correct a problem.



Dental Diets

So, how do you take care of your cat's teeth? Brushing is one of the best ways, and is best started when the cat is still young. Introducing an older cat to a toothbrush is like . . . well . . . introducing an older cat to anything new and suspicious!

Some pet food companies are now offering *dental diets*: food that actively works to reduce plaque and tartar buildup. The process of eating the food actually deters the accumulation of plaque, thus reducing the development of the mineralized tartar.

Dental diets are fairly new, however, and even with a good quality food, some at-home brushing and veterinary care is still required.