

## Dental products for your dog and cat: The Heroes (and villains)

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Choosing dental products for your pet can be overwhelming. Pet store shelves are filled with products promising to give your pet a healthy mouth, but not all dental products are effective or even safe. Here are some tips on finding the right products.

1. A list of dental products certified by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) can be found at [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org). This organization evaluates clinical studies submitted by manufacturers and determines if the product has been shown to be effective in reducing plaque and tartar on the teeth of animals when used as directed. Products that meet the VOHC standards for plaque and tartar removal receive the VOHC Registered Seal. This is a good place to start when evaluating a product for your pet, particularly for water additives, dental diets and dental treats.
2. Many toys advertised as effective for keeping dogs' teeth clean are too hard and can break teeth. We regularly see dogs that have broken their teeth on real bones, antlers, cow hooves, hard nylon bones, and yak milk chews.
3. Chew toys and treats that are less likely to break teeth include Kong toys, rubber balls, rawhides, and pig's ears. Rawhides and pig's ears can present a choking hazard or cause an intestinal obstruction. Pets should always be supervised when given these treats, and they should not be given to pets that swallow these treats whole.
4. Toothpaste. Never use human toothpaste on your dog. Human toothpaste contains fluoride that can be toxic if swallowed. Most pet toothpastes are effective in removing plaque from your pet's teeth when used with a bristle brush. This is one instance where the VOHC seal is less important. The purpose of the toothpaste is to lubricate the brush and to make brushing more palatable to your dog. Many toothpastes have enzymatic additives that help remove plaque, but it is the mechanical action of the toothbrush that is most important. Whatever pet toothpaste your dog or cat likes, is the best product for them.
5. Toothbrushes. Any soft bristle toothbrush that fits well in your pet's mouth is effective. Finger brushes are not recommended. Unlike soft bristle brushes, most finger brushes have plastic bristles that do not reach below the gum line. Furthermore, many pets chew the bristles, which helps clean the teeth. The consequences of a pet chewing on your finger are not ideal!
6. Finally, remember that any product that claims to dissolve calculus, cure periodontal disease, perform "brushless toothbrushing" or perform any other type of miracle is most likely too good to be true. After all, if there was a spray or powder that could eliminate the need for brushing, wouldn't you be using it too?