



# Bad Breath is Bad News

4 ways to keep your dog's mouth healthy

**S**alt and pepper. Shampoo and conditioner. Dogs and bad breath. For years, these things always seemed to come in twos—and all were considered harmless. But a growing number of veterinarians and dog experts insist a dog's bad breath is actually a warning sign of much greater problems to come, and they want to change the perception that pooches and putrid breath inevitably go hand-in-hand.

"When plaque gets backed up, it can get beneath the gumline, which can lead to bacteria anywhere else in the body—the heart, especially," says Dr. Katrin Lavell, a veteri-



Natural Breath Drops from Spa Dog Botanicals

narian with Pets are People, Too, in Atlanta. "There is definitely a link between a dog's oral health and his or her quality and length of life."

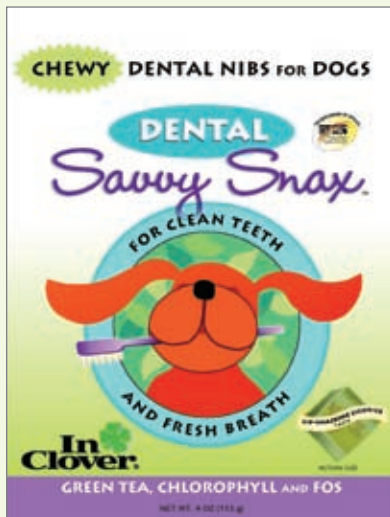
With research from the American Veterinary Dental Society showing that more than 80 percent of dogs develop periodontal disease by age 3, the importance of taking care of your canine's mouth is clearer than ever. The following are four ways dog owners can boost their pups' oral health, from the obvious (brushing) to the surprising (bet you didn't know Rover's tennis ball is actually good for his teeth!):

### 1. Scrub those pearly whites.

OK, in your dog's case, they may be lemon yellows. Still, it's not too late to give those chompers a good cleaning. "Brushing your pet's teeth is one of the easiest ways to prevent serious health consequences, like loss of teeth, periodontal disease and infections to the organs," says Alicia Leithauser, president of Keep It Clean, a company that created a travel dental kit for animals. And we don't mean you should brush your dog's teeth once a month—we mean every day. "It's the same as it is with people; you have to do it daily," Lavell says. "If you only brushed your teeth every few weeks, your mouth would feel pretty rotten. Same goes for dogs." Does your pup squirm or even snap when you try to give his or her teeth a cleaning? Vets insist dogs will get used to brushing over time—and the effort you expend coaxing them beats the alternative. "When I tell clients that not brushing their dogs' teeth means they may have to put their dogs under anesthesia for scaling or extractions, they find a way to start brushing," Lavell says.

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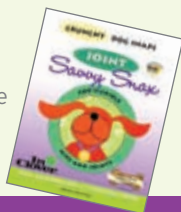
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Above: Keep It Clean (TM) Pet Dental Kit;  
Below: Cloud Star's Minty Madness Buddy Biscuits

### 2. Get chummy with your vet.

Make an appointment with your veterinarian for your dog's routine dental cleaning, asking him or her to identify any problem areas they see. "Just like people, dogs should get a dental cleaning every six months," Lavell says.

### 3. Buy smart food.

When it comes to helping your dog's mouth, not all foods are created equal. "Lots of dog foods have sugar, which is something many people don't know," says Jennifer Melton, co-founder of Cloud Star, an all-natural pet-treats and grooming-product line. Cloud Star developed Minty Madness Buddy Biscuits, which are made of natural breath boosters like spirulina, alfalfa and peppermint and are hard enough to help scrape plaque off teeth. But don't be fooled into thinking harder is always better. "If a bone is hard enough to hammer a nail into the wall, it's too hard," Lavell says. "Soak it for a few minutes in cool water. You don't want your dog to get rid of plaque but end up chipping a tooth instead!" What's a safe thing for your pup to chew on? His or her tennis ball, which gently scrapes plaque off teeth, especially back molars.

### 4. Reinforce your efforts.

There are plenty of supplemental oral-care products and medicines available that can help keep Buddy's mouth healthy; in fact, the number of these products quadrupled from 2000 to 2004. From gels you can rub on your dog's gumline to a new dental vaccine for small dogs to

drops you can put in your canine's water bowl, the options are staggering. "We developed natural breath drops from a licorice-extract blend to help dog owners with daily breath maintenance," says Sharon Mueller, founder of Spa Dog Botanicals. "People love it; it's one of our best sellers."

Before you begin a new oral-healthcare program for your dog, be sure to

consult your veterinarian about the best options for your pup and the proper techniques to use. But whatever you do, don't buy into the myth that your dog's bad breath is nothing to worry about. "Keeping your dog's mouth healthy is a huge deal, and people are starting to realize that," Lavell says. "Fifteen years ago, people would laugh at you if they heard you were brushing your dog's teeth. Now, many families understand that the best way to care for your dog is to prevent problems from occurring in the first place." 🐾

