

## TOOTH and GUM CARE

*By Julie Gleeson, Wisdom's Gate Norfolk Terriers*

Norfolk Terriers and their close cousins, the Norwich, seem to have more issues with tooth and gum disease than many of the other breeds I have owned or known about. When I purchased my first Norfolk in 1985 or so, no instructions were given to tooth care, and subsequently my dear Rustie had to have 8 teeth pulled when he was 10 years old. Hard on him, hard on me, hard on my wallet and possibly unnecessary if I had done regular tooth care all through his life.

Dobermans don't see, to have this issue, so how was I to know? What are the clues I missed? Bad breath, for sure. (I thought it was diet related and tried all kinds of things for that!) Tartar. (Don't all dogs get tartar as they age? Apparently not!) Drooling later in life. (Old age issue, right? Wrong!) Since that time I have taken on a regular and fairly rigorous tooth care regimen with my dogs and have had wonderful results.

I now brush my dogs' teeth at least 2-3 times per week, and if I have one whose gums still bleed on that timeline, I brush daily. I begin them (after a long walk) with an electric toothbrush, turned off, and make sure they love the dog toothpaste I use. The best approach to this beginning phase

is to place the dog on a table or into a sink and gently pull the muzzle hair up, exposing the teeth. This forms a pocket so that the back teeth on that side can be reached as well. Remember to praise your dog, and once you start, don't stop just because they squirm! As a side note: **DO NOT USE HUMAN TOOTHPASTE ON DOGS.** The ingredients in human toothpaste can be deadly to dogs.

Once the dog is used to the toothpaste and non-electric tooth-brushing, I turn the toothbrush on mid-brush and give them a short session of the electric brushing. If they tolerate that well, the next time I begin with it turned off and then almost immediately turn it on. My dogs are so busy trying to get the glob of toothpaste that they virtually ignore the fact that I am brushing! Don't worry about the backside of the teeth as these are almost impossible to reach. Instead, concentrate on making sure that the gums get a vigorous brushing, and that all of the teeth are brushed on the outside. I spend no more than a minute or two, total, on the whole mouth. If the gums bleed when you do this, it is a sure sign that gum disease has begun. Those dogs need to have their teeth brushed daily until the gums no longer bleed. If the dog objects

to the electric toothbrush, stick with the manual brushing as it is certainly much, much better than nothing.

My oldest, Annie, who will be 12 in December, came to me as a young adult who, from the look and smell of it, had never had any attention to their teeth. I almost vomited, literally, when I first kissed her face, the smell was so horrid. When I investigated, she had almost no enamel visible, only tartar and bright red gums. I scraped the tartar myself, and got huge pieces that popped off, the side of my fingernail. After about two weeks of brushing, her gums became healthy again and to this day, other than teeth she broke chewing on a rock (I know, she's a Norfolk,) we've had no loss of teeth.

So, Check all of those gums and teeth this evening! If there is a cherry-red line at the base of each tooth, you have the beginning of gum disease. And gum disease can lead very quickly to heart disease. Get after it now! You'll thank me later.



Smile