

February is National Pet Dental Health Month.

Probiotics and Dental Care

While the importance of dental care for humans is often stressed, we sometimes tend to overlook how important it can be in the health care of our canine friends. Just as a lack of proper dental care in humans can lead to numerous problems, including overall health issues as well as dental problems, the lack of proper dental care in dogs can also result in serious issues.

Have you noticed lately that many products seem to be touting the benefits of probiotics? It seems everywhere you turn, there is a new yogurt product or some other product on the market that now contains probiotics and the manufacturers claim it is the solution to all of our ailments.

What are probiotics, are they really good for us and could they possibly be important for our dogs as well as us?

Probiotics are actually a type of live bacteria. While we commonly think of bacteria as being harmful, the truth of the matter is that some bacteria are actually beneficial and probiotics happens to be one of them. Everyone, including our dogs, has good bacteria that live inside them. The idea behind including probiotics in your diet, or in your pet's diet, is based on the theory that we often do not have enough good bacteria in our bodies to combat the bad bacteria. It's really a good guys vs. bad guys scenario. When we replenish the good forms of bacteria in our bodies they are able to flourish and combat the bad bacteria. It's all about numbers. You want to have more good bacteria than bad bacteria in your body and the same is true for your pet as well.

How do probiotics help dental issues in pets? Stop and think about it for a minute. What develops on teeth when they are not properly cared for? Plaque. What is plaque? It's a bacteria and not one of the good kinds. When food is consumed, plaque builds up on the teeth and in the mouth. When plaque isn't removed it can turn into tartar, which is bacteria that are dead and have become calcified.

It's important to remove plaque and tartar not just in our mouths and our teeth, but also for our pets as well. Reducing plaque and limiting tartar can help to prevent 'doggie breath' and neutralize odors.

[Probiotic based oral sprays](#) work by replenishing the good guys, or the good bacteria, in your pet's mouth. When the good bacteria outnumber the bad bacteria they kill off the bad guys through a process known as competitive exclusion. There just are not enough resources for both the bad and the good bacteria to thrive. Increase the good bacteria and the bad bacteria will eventually be displaced.

When looking for a [probiotic oral spray](#) for your pet, it is important to keep a few guidelines in mind.

- First, you want to look for a product that does not contain alcohol. This is extremely important because a lot of the sprays on the market do contain alcohol and you want to avoid those. Did you know that the high concentration of alcohol in mouthwash has been associated with oral cancer? Furthermore, alcohol just makes bad breath worse because of its drying effect. So, look for a non-alcohol based probiotic oral spray for your pet.
- Look for one that contains multiple strains of probiotics for the best results. At least ten different strands are recommended for the best results.
- Look for a product that does not contain Genetically Modified Organisms. A non-GMO product will provide your pet with optimal health benefits.

In conclusion, keeping your dog's teeth clean is a major commitment but in the end your dog will live longer (yes, it can add up to 3 years to your dog's life) and your dog's kisses will be much more enjoyable.