

Clean as a Hound's Tooth

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If given the opportunity to alter this “nearly perfect” breed of dog, the greyhound, what would you change? Perhaps you would wish for an abundance of fur on the thighs and chest, and no chance of becoming hypothyroid. Not a bad idea. What else? How about flexible bones that bend, but never break? Now you're talking! That would be great at the track as well as in adoptive homes. What would you think about the non-existence of separation anxiety? Just think about all the drool you'd be missing, not to mention other bodily by-products. All these improvements would be great, but if given this rare opportunity, the first thing I would do would be to give this fabulous breed a perfect, low-maintenance set of teeth.

The reality of the situation is quite the opposite. This great breed is eminently prone to a lifetime of dental disease unless you, the owner, are committed to correcting one of life's dirty tricks with regular daily dental care.

There are many hypotheses to explain the huge amount of painful, putrid, decaying calculus and infected debris that these mouths harbor (not to mention the gingivitis, pyorrhea, and odor). Suffice it to say that the combination of limited gnawing and chewing opportunities with a high quality but stewlike diet lends itself well to plaque and calculus formation at a very early age. Once the plaque has a chance to take hold, it progresses to rock-hard calculus and it is there to stay unless a professional dental prophylaxis occurs. If it is not removed regularly, it can result in gum recession and subsequently painful gingivitis, infection, and ultimately the untimely loss of teeth—often a large number of teeth.

Assuming that when your newly adopted family member arrives, his or her oral cavity has been properly managed, the burden of care now lies squarely on your shoulders. If you are reluctant to brush your pet's teeth, or your pet is reluctant to have his or her teeth brushed, the inevitable result will be halitosis and the need for regular dental prophylaxis, expensive veterinary bills, anesthesia risks, and the loss of irreplaceable teeth. All these are avoidable, but preventing them requires unwavering commitment and dedication.

There are no shortcuts! Many gimmicks are available. Rawhides have value but can cause gastrointestinal upset. Bones are good if your dog will chew them, but they can easily break or crack teeth. Milkbones, t/d, and other dog treats are helpful but cannot stand alone to win this battle. There is only one way to maintain a greyhound's mouth, and that is with a minimum of daily brushing. Twice daily is twice as good. Once a week is useless. Twice weekly is half as useless. An adage commonly used by human dentists states: “Only brush the teeth you want to keep.” This is true for greyhounds also. Everybody has their own style of brushing and their own preference in brushes. It is best to use what you feel the most comfortable with. Make dental care a routine. Do it at the same time every day and DO IT WITHOUT FAIL. This is a very small price to pay for unconditional love, don't you think?