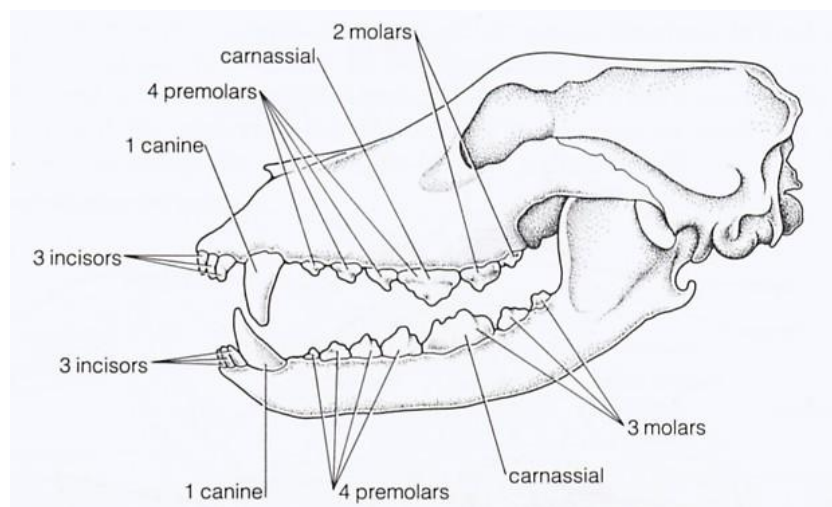


Understanding and Caring for your Cavalier's Teeth

Adult dogs have 42 permanent teeth, (20 upper and 22 lower) and puppies have 28 baby, or deciduous teeth, (14 upper and 14 lower). Puppies' deciduous teeth emerge at about 3-4 weeks of age and last until their permanent adult teeth, which begin to emerge at about 3-4 months of age. The following table shows at what age the various teeth appear and the diagram shows the placement of an adult dog's teeth.

Tooth Eruption		
	Deciduous	Permanent
Incisors	4 - 6 weeks	3 - 5 months
Canine	5 - 6 weeks	4 - 6 months
Premolars	6 weeks	4 - 5 months
Molars		5 - 7 months



ADULT CANINE DENTITION CHART

DENTAL HEALTH

Dental health is a very important part of overall health in dogs. Canine tooth and gum diseases are very common, with small and shorter faced breeds being particularly susceptible. The original canine, or wolf, was a larger animal with a long face and large, strong teeth. Over the centuries hundreds of different breeds have evolved, all with the same dentition. Obviously the shorter faced breeds have less room in their mouths to house all these teeth and this has resulted in severe overcrowding of the teeth in the mouth, and has led to the development of smaller teeth with shallow roots.

The most common dental problems seen in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels are

- Gum disease, popularly known as gingivitis, which occurs when gum tissue suffers from an inflammation. Without proper treatment, gingivitis may lead to periodontitis, teeth loosening, and finally, loss of teeth.
- Periodontitis, or periodontal disease is the most common dental problem for canines and it is estimated that it affects 80% of dogs over the age of three. It is caused by various factors such as plaque, food debris, cell mucus, and a mixture of bacteria, creating a film on the dog's teeth as well as the gums. When this film combines with saliva, the plaque it causes becomes tartar, and is very hard to remove. The small overcrowded teeth in a Cavalier's mouth provide an ideal environment for the collection of food particles and bacteria.

Periodontal disease has been called the 'silent killer of pets', and it causes serious deterioration of the gums and supporting bones of the teeth, tooth loss, tooth decay and bad breath. Left unchecked, the resulting bacteria can enter your dog's bloodstream, causing infection or damage to vital organs such as the heart, kidneys, lungs, and liver.

It has been said that proper oral health care may actually extend the life of your dog by 2 to 5 years.

TOOTH AND MOUTH CARE

There are a number of different ways dog owners use to care for their dogs' teeth, some of which can be used in conjunction with each other.

Brushing Teeth

The teeth should be brushed at least once or twice a week, more often if possible. As with grooming, it is best started early in the puppy's life so that it becomes accustomed to the routine.

Nowadays a variety of pet toothbrushes and pet toothpastes are available. One such tooth brush fits over the end of your finger like a thimble. Alternatively you can make a toothbrush by folding a square gauze pad loosely around the tip of your index finger. Dip the toothbrush or gauze pad in a toothpaste designed for dogs (do NOT use human toothpaste) or into a paste made of baking soda and water and use it to vigorously scrub the outside surfaces of the teeth, especially the rear teeth. With the gauze pad, you may also try to gently massage the gums. It is not necessary to brush the interior surfaces of the teeth.

One method of getting your Cavalier used to having its teeth brushed is to dip your finger into vegemite, Nutrigel or peanut butter and then rub your finger gently over the dog's teeth and gums. Your Cavalier will like the taste and will look forward to this game. Then put some gauze bandage over your finger and continue doing the same thing. When your pet is coping with this introduce the toothbrush or finger brush.

Healthy Diet Including Bones

Soft, mushy processed foods are not ideal as they stick in and around the teeth. Dry biscuits are better, especially if they are hard, but even then, dry biscuit mixed with saliva can also be very sticky. A diet of natural raw foods is best and should include raw chicken necks, wings or carcasses for your dog to chew on.

A raw, meaty bone, such as a lamb shank, once or twice a week is an excellent aid to keeping your Cavalier's teeth clean as it will help to remove the plaque that is developing. Ideally the bone should have some meat on it as this will encourage your Cavalier to use its front teeth to tear the meat from the bone and will provide excellent exercise for the teeth, gums and jaws. Bones should always be raw and should always be larger, chunky bones. NEVER feed T Bones, chop bones or any cooked bones.

Hydrogen Peroxide and Water Additives

Adding several drops of Hydrogen Peroxide to each bowl of drinking water, can help in maintain clean teeth by killing many of the tartar causing bacteria in the mouth. Hydrogen Peroxide can also be used on a cotton wool ball to rub over the teeth as an aid to cleaning them and killing bacteria.

Several other commercial products are available which can be added to your Cavalier's drinking water to help maintain clean teeth. These are available from Vets, Pet Stores and online.

Gels And Sprays

There is a range of gels and sprays available from Vets, Pet Stores and online, which are designed to remove and/or prevent the formation of plaque and tartar on dogs' teeth, and aid in reducing gum inflammation and mouth bacteria.

One of these, is a totally natural product called Petzlife Oral Care. It comes in both a gel and a spray. Although not cheap to purchase a small bottle will last three months when applied daily to remove plaque and tartar. If the teeth are reasonably clean and the product only needs to be used once or twice a week for maintenance a bottle will last for many months. The website www.petzlife.com will give you more information on the product.

Veterinary Attention

Your veterinarian should check your Cavalier's mouth for tooth or gum disease during annual checkups or at any time you feel there is a build up of tartar or inflammation of the gums. Despite your best efforts, a proper dental cleaning under general anaesthesia may need to be performed periodically. During this procedure the teeth will be scaled and cleaned and any that are badly affected will be removed.

After cleaning, a home dental care program will help to maintain your Cavalier's teeth in good condition.

