

# Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, Inc.

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**Sweet Golden Kisses****GRRoW Hotline: 888-655-4753**

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## **Sweet Golden Kisses**

*by Dr. Ron Beatty, DVM*

Sweet Golden kisses result from good dental care! Remember when your Golden had that wonderful puppy breath? Being a member of GRRoW you've probably adopted a mature dog, but you know what I mean. The first thing I like to do when I meet a puppy is pick him up and smell his breath while he licks my face. The smell of a puppy breath is real joy!

As a Golden Retriever lover you are really lucky. Many dogs, especially small breed lap dogs, are notorious for horrendous breath and rotten teeth. Why do some dogs have more dental problems than others? Veterinary dentists surmise it may be related to the anatomy and size of a mouth, the ability of the gums to provide a good saliva rinse, how much a dog chews toys, the type of food eaten and heredity. However, Golden Retrievers definitely require dental maintenance, too.

Here are my recommendations for home dental care:

**Feed only dry kibble.** Canned or soft foods stick to the teeth and build up on the teeth faster. I can tell in a single glance at a dog's teeth even if he is being fed a small amount of soft food! Even a small amount of canned food causes plaque and tartar to build-up much more quickly. There is absolutely no reason to feed your dog canned food unless your vet has prescribed it for a medical condition. Some people like to use canned food to spike their dog's dry kibble to encourage them eat. Remember, obesity is an epidemic among Golden Retrievers and they don't require encouragement to eat! There are veterinary prescription dry kibble foods that are designed to help scrub the teeth as your dog chews—they are not a gimmick and really work well. Science Diet Hill's T/D is one example. These foods can be fed solely or you can mix these into your dog's regular food to help slow plaque and tartar accumulation. As for Milk Bones® and so called dental biscuits, the real truth is that they don't do much except add calories to your dog's diet. Use carrots and veggies and fruits for healthy treats.

**Brush your dog's teeth at least twice weekly.** Please don't use human toothpaste, though, because dogs hate the fluoride burn and foaminess. It may also upset their stomachs. Buy a poultry, beef or malt flavored pet toothpaste. You can use a soft bristle brush or a finger brush while making the little circular swirling motions as you do on your own teeth. Your vet or his veterinary assistant can show you the key places to brush: these are the upper canine teeth and the upper fourth premolars (sometimes called the carnassial teeth) which are the biggest teeth in the mouth. See the diagram.

**Do not use cooked bones of any kind for chews.** Yes, I know that dogs love bones! Cooked bones are as hard as teeth and often cause tooth fractures. I can't even guess at the number of broken teeth that I have extracted as a result of cooked bone chewing. An alternative for a recently fractured healthy tooth is a root canal, but this is very expensive. Fractured teeth often become infected and painful. See the diagram (above) of carnassial tooth root infection or abscess. If you have ever had an infected or broken tooth you know how painful it can be. Dogs may tolerate the discomfort better than humans, but that doesn't mean they can't feel the pain. Just say, "No" to cooked bone for your Golden.

**Use good chew toys.** Examples: Nylabone and Kong brand toys are very good. Kongs are stuffed with peanut butter and kibble among other things. If your Golden is a chew toy destroyer, buy one of the tougher versions of the chew toys. Just keep in mind: 1) toss out any small pieces of chew toys and 2) supervise your pet with chew toys. In the past, I have removed socks, kids' toys, underwear, tampons, rocks, garbage – among other things – from dog stomachs and intestines, but never anything that I listed as a chew toy. That's not to say it

couldn't happen. We have to be realistic in assessing risk. Recently, the company that makes Greenies has been under intense fire from the news media. However, I believe the real truth is that they are no more dangerous than other dog chews. Just keep in mind: 1) toss out any small pieces of chew toys and 2) supervise your pet with chew toys. One exception is leaving a dog with a stuffed Kong to keep him busy while you are away from home. This is one common technique used in treating separation anxiety.

**Oral Rinses.** This is an option for those who don't have time to brush or a dog who absolutely refuses to allow brushing. These products are akin to the oral rinses that people use. However, rinses for dogs have been made much more palatable for them. Lastly, there is an additive for your pet's water bowl that works well. Virbac makes a product called Aquadent that is effective at slowing plaque and tartar build-up.

**OraVet enamel sealer.** You can prevent plaque and tartar build-up by applying it to teeth once weekly at home. Some veterinary clinics have not caught on to this product, yet. It is waxy substance that is put on with a small disposable applicator. I recommend it and it's quite effective.

I recommend that my clients use several of the recommendations. After dry kibble, remember that brushing is the single best technique for good dental care. It is also the most cost effective.

Good dental care is not just a matter of wanting sweet smelling kisses from your dog—although that certainly is a benefit. Your canine companion will live 1-2 years longer if he has good dental health! It's true. Periodontal disease will shorten your beloved companion's life by damaging his vital organs.

This may sound odd, but dogs don't tend to get cavities like people do. They get periodontal disease. What's the difference? Cavities are small local areas of decay. Periodontal disease is the recession of the gum and bone that hold the tooth in place by an infection of smelly bacteria. Not only do these bacteria literally "rot" the teeth loose out of the mouth, they cause some even more nasty and insidious health problems. Bacteria enter the blood stream from the mouth. Then they deposit on the heart valves and in the blood vessel meshwork of the kidneys and liver that filter blood. Pets and people don't even appear ill while this happening.

Recently, I had an uncle in need of open heart surgery. Guess what the cardiologist told him? "I'll do surgery on your heart if you first get your teeth fixed by a dentist." The cardiologist was well aware of the effects of periodontal disease on heart health and healing. My uncle was really embarrassed about avoiding a dentist and not brushing his teeth! His embarrassment was the least of his problems.

Even though you may take wonderful care of your dog's teeth he still may require a dental cleaning at some point in his life. Dogs may need their teeth cleaned or scaled just like you or I do. It's a common procedure that I do on pets just about everyday. I always kid clients by saying that pets won't sit in a chair and say "ahh," so they will require gas anesthesia for the short procedure. If your companion's physical exam and preanesthetic blood work are normal his anesthetic risk is very small and his benefit from the procedure great. In addition, I recommend intravenous fluids to protect vital organs and maintain blood pressure. The dental procedure entails a thorough cleaning above and below the gum line, typically, with an ultrasonic scaler. It gently pops the plaque and tartar right off of the tooth without gouging of the enamel surface. Finally, the last key step is polishing which smooths any irregularities in the enamel surfaces. Scraping your own dog's teeth or having your groomer do it is not as effective and may permanently damage the tooth enamel. Scratches in the enamel will allow plaque and tartar to quickly accumulate and anchor solidly on a tooth. Unfortunately, if the teeth are already damaged your vet may not be able to do an effective dental scaling and polishing.

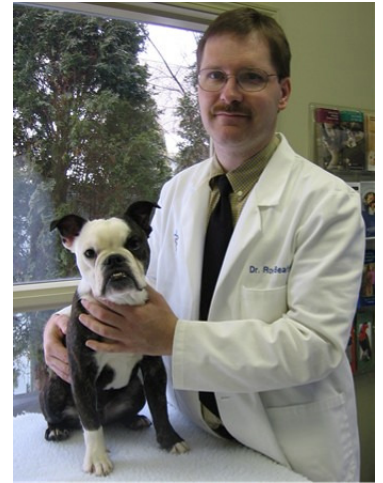
If you neglect you dog's dental care the day will come when you run from his kisses! Don't ever be in a position where you refuse a kiss from your Golden. Now you know the basics of good canine dental care. Get sweet kisses and give your Golden a healthier longer life.

### About Dr. Beatty:

Dr. Beatty graduated from the University of Wisconsin Madison [School of Veterinary Medicine](#) in 2001. Veterinary school is just as difficult to enter and is equally as challenging as medical school. He focused on exotic pets as well as cats and dogs. In order to properly care for pets his education never stops. Dr. Beatty regularly attends [continuing education](#) events so he can learn new medical and surgical skills to benefit our patients.

Since graduation he has worked in the greater Milwaukee area. He enjoys seeing all companion animals-dogs, cats, birds, reptiles, rabbits, ferrets, chinchillas, guinea pigs, sugar gliders and other small mammals. His clients especially appreciate his gentle nature with their pets. Dr. Beatty is still amazed by the deep bond that people share with pets. One of his greatest joys in life is to care for animals.

In his free time, Dr. Beatty enjoys gardening, home handyman projects, going to the Menomonee Falls dog park, and reading.



*Dr. Ron Beatty cares for Golden Retrievers at  
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