

What Is It About Boxers & Their Gum Problems?

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PROGNOSIS

Plaque, Tartar, Gingivitis: Build-up of plaque (and subsequently, formation of tartar) can be prevented with regular teeth brushing using a quality veterinary enzymatic toothpaste like C.E.T.

Periodontitis: Once dog receives a thorough vet clinic-performed cleaning, tartar removal, application/administration of fluoride and/or antibiotic treatments (dependent on how advanced the disease is), re-checks of the condition are to be expected. Implementation of regular at-home dental hygiene will prevent recurrence. In extreme/very advanced stages of periodontitis, bone replacement procedures, periodontal splinting, and guided tissue regeneration may be necessary.

Gingival Hyperplasia/Epulis: Even with surgical excision, recurrence is likely; how long recurrence takes (months, years) is unknown and varies from dog to dog.

WHEN TO SCHEDULE CLEANINGS AND/OR SURGERY

Dental cleaning by your veterinarian is definitely in order if periodontal disease is present.

Factors to consider when considering surgery:

- You are dealing with a Boxer, a breed that sometimes experiences problems with anesthesia and sedation drugs associated with surgical procedures.
- Boxer's age: the older a Boxer is, the riskier surgery is (airway obstruction due to brachycephalic structure; predisposition for hypersensitivity to anesthesia, which increases risk of overdose and/or longer recovery from anesthesia; predisposition to heart disease, which increases risks of anesthesia, etc.).

If periodontal disease is severe and there are many loose and/or rotting teeth and/or hyperplasia/epulis has overtaken most of the molars (chewing teeth), you really have no choice but surgery, as leaving the condition as-is is painful and detrimental to the dog and its overall health. Excessive bacteria can enter the bloodstream and cause other life-threatening conditions.

However, knowing ahead of time how periodontal disease begins, you can employ preventive maintenance methods and avoid the development of periodontal disease. Hence, you avoid surgery for periodontal disease.

If hyperplasia or epulis develops, usually seen at ages 4 and up, you can take a wait-and-see stance, provided you've kept teeth clean and gums healthy, and delay surgery until gum encroachment and/or tumors are nearly engulfing major teeth (canines, molars).

Six of my nine Boxers had hyperplasia and/or epulis (non-malignant, thank goodness) problems. There were no preventive maintenance methods employed with my first Boxer. It was a mess. By the time we even noticed that his breath smelled like rotten fish all the time, the hyperplasia had completely covered his molars and they were mashed, infected and bleeding because he was chewing on

them. He had numerous teeth that were very loose and one that had begun to rot-out. (As a first-time Boxer owner, I had no idea about the breed's predisposition to gum/teeth problems.)

From my second Boxer to present, I have brushed my Boxers' teeth and kept the gums healthy. Onset of hyperplasia and epulis varied (two as early as 3 years of age; the remainder from about age 5 and later). Four went through one surgery each involving teeth and gums. My instructions to the vet were: excise gum growths and extract any/all loose teeth. The fifth Boxer actually required three surgeries for hyperplasia throughout her 12-year life. The sixth underwent two surgeries. Yes, some Boxers' gums just keep growing!

Years ago I fostered a 5 year old rescued Boxer who had one very large epulis when she came to us from a local shelter at age 4 in June 2012. We had the epulis excised in July 2012; it was benign. As of July 2013, she had four epulis in locations other than the site of the original epulis; another surgery removed them. About a year after she was adopted she developed one more epulis which was surgically removed by the adopter's vet.

A WORD ABOUT ANESTHESIA-FREE TEETH CLEANING

The practice of teeth cleaning without the use of anesthesia has become available of-late. I myself pass a local pet supply store that publicizes the service year-round:

Anesthesia-free teeth cleaning is our preferred choice for our own dogs and cats. Cleanings are done by a visiting technician using hand tools only. He holds the dog or cat in his lap while talking to the pet in a soothing, reassuring manner. His technique is gentle, thorough and completely drug-free. The cleaning itself takes about 20 minutes.

Only routine cleanings can be performed. Your dog or cat will first have a brief wellness exam by a licensed veterinarian and if more extensive oral care is needed such as extractions or treatment for gum disease, you will be referred to your vet for further treatment.

Only hand-friendly dogs who aren't aggressive or overly fearful are good candidates for this service.

I personally am ambivalent about anesthesia-free teeth cleaning. I only know that none of my own Boxers would be suitable candidates for the procedure.

Information on an opposing view of anesthesia-free teeth cleaning and why this practice may not be in the best interest of your dog, read the position of the American Veterinary Dental College (AVDC) at: <https://afd.avdc.org/what-is-an-anesthesia-free-dental-cleaning/>

TIPS FOR POST-SURGERY

Your Boxer will likely be sent home with antibiotics (example: Clindamycin) and pain medication (example: Rimadyl or carprofen)... this is normal. Administer medications as directed.

Your Boxer may or may not have sutures where major teeth may have been extracted.

Your Boxer WILL be thirsty when you bring him/her home; do NOT over-water. They are likely to throw-up. Offer only a cup (8 oz. *measured*) of water. If there is no vomiting, you can offer another cup of water before bedtime.

If your Boxer is very drowsy, it won't do any harm to skip a meal. If your Boxer is alert, feed only one-half to a cup of food for dinner. Again, anesthesia can make the Boxer tummy a little sensitive. Feeding too much food can cause vomiting.

Your vet will likely recommend a soft (canned) diet. I like to use any of the following prescription canned food: Royal Canin Gastro-intestinal, Hill's I/D (intestinal diet), or Purina Veterinary EN (enteric diet) because all are very bland. The used of canned food is easy on gums that will be raw from surgery, and bland food is easy on the Boxer's GI tract, which is often sensitive after being under anesthesia.

After every meal, allow your dog to drink some water, which will help rinse out loose food particles, then smear about an inch of C.E.T. toothpaste between lips and gums upper and lower. The dog's tongue will help to distribute the paste throughout the entire mouth. The toothpaste's enzymatic action will help to lower bacteria levels.

Additional Option: Use a dental rinse (example: C.E.T. Oral Hygiene Rinse or Vetoquinol DentaHex Pet Oral Hygiene Rinse) after each meal, which will help keep bacteria levels down and also fight-off plaque.

Or, you can just use a bulb-style ear syringe and warm water to rinse. I dissolve just a little bit of table salt (about one-half teaspoon to a cup of water) in the warm water...the saline solution is very soothing to raw gums. Dispense the water such that most of it drains out of the mouth; try not to let the dog ingest too much of the water. If your Boxer is swallowing too much of the water, eliminate the salt next time.

After about five days your dog's gums will no longer have a bloody ridge where the excess growths were excised; at this point, you can resume teeth brushing. If a red ridge is still visible, wait a few more days to resume brushing. BRUSH VERY GENTLY for about a week; do not be alarmed if you see a small amount of bleeding. This will stop after 2-3 days. You can resume normal brushing once the red ridges are gone.

NOTE: IF YOUR BOXER HAS SUTURES, do NOT start any brushing until the sutures are removed or dissolved (your vet will advise if follow-up is needed on any sutures). If sutures are still present, you can continue to smear toothpaste to get those enzymes in the mouth to digest excess bacteria.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

A simple plan: Adopt the Asian concept of a well body—a clean and healthy mouth is essential to overall good health.

There is no preventive maintenance for gingival hyperplasia or epulis. Preventive practices focus on plaque removal and prevention of tartar build-up. The goal is to keep teeth clean and gums healthy and strong.

Clean teeth and strong, healthy gums are half the battle with Boxers. Should surgical excision become necessary, any vet would prefer working on healthy gums vs. inflamed and infected gums because healthy gums recover and heal more quickly. And, in theory, if teeth are clean and gums healthy, your Boxer should spend less time under anesthesia should surgery be necessary to excise hyperplasia or epulis because the tasks involving teeth-cleaning would take less time.

Regular teeth-brushing using a quality vet-grade toothpaste (I personally recommend C.E.T.-brand). Veterinary toothpaste is enzymatic; enzymes digest bacteria. Brushing is the only way to stimulate and strengthen gums; it also helps remove hair, food and debris from between gums and teeth. Note: Never use human toothpaste for dogs. They contain ingredients that dogs should not ingest. Veterinary toothpastes are made safe for dogs to swallow.

Use a toddler-size or adult brush with a small head. Use only SOFT or EXTRA SOFT bristles. Rinsing the brush under hot water will soften the bristles even more, and by the time you apply toothpaste

to the brush, it won't be too hot against the gums when you brush. Several owners I know have gotten their Boxer used to ultrasonic toothbrushes...fabulous!

Occasional RAW uncooked bones (direct from butcher shop or bought frozen at pet food stores). But beware: aggressive chewers can chip/break their teeth, and too much untrimmed fat or lots of marrow adds calories and can cause diarrhea or digestive upsets.

Why raw bones? Because raw bones are digestible; as your Boxer scrapes and chews down a raw bone, what they ingest will move through their digestive tract safely. Any kind of cooking process hardens a bone which will cause the bone to splinter when chewed.

Look inside your Boxer's mouth on a regular basis, especially if bad breath is a frequent problem. Is your Boxer uncooperative? All the more reason to start brushing teeth. Remember, your vet needs access to your dog's mouth during the exam process; get your Boxer used to having humans checking their mouth.

There are many "**dental health**" kibbles on the market today. Ask your vet for their recommendation, or search for "dental health kibble for dogs" on-line. The kibble is often over-sized and very crunchy, meant to provide scraping-action to keep plaque and tartar at-bay. The effectiveness of these special diets are not clear-cut, and they do not take into account special dietary preferences (e.g., protein sources, etc.).

There are **various other dental chews** (rawhide-type), **sticks** and **treats** (greenies, etc.). The type you may choose to try (or not) depends on your individual dog. Most are safe for gentle-to-moderate chewers. If you have an aggressive chewer, or a dog that tends to swallow chunks, it's probably best to stay with teeth-brushing as your best preventive maintenance.

For several years, there was a **vaccine** that was designed as an aid to preventing periodontitis. The vaccine protected a dog against some of the main *bacteria* responsible for periodontal disease in dogs. In April 2011, however, Pfizer Animal Health discontinued the vaccine because of issues surrounding its effectiveness. My own veterinarian discontinued administering the vaccine shortly after its release because it was very difficult to gauge whether or not the vaccine was 'working' because there were so many other variables that were in-play as to whether or not a dog developed periodontal disease.

EXTRA TIPS ON DOGGIE BREATH

I learned many years ago that the addition of freeze-dried kelp to a dog's food can help with day-to-day doggie-breath (not the kind associated with dental/gum disease). I assume it's actually the chlorophyll at work, but whatever it is, the kelp does help. I usually use Life Line Icelandic Ocean Kelp (certified USDA organic). It has consistently remained nominally-priced and easily available in stores or on-line over the years.

A final note of caution: Some dogs are allergic to or can suffer toxic effects from food supplements such as kelp and other supplements like blue-green algae. Always research any supplement you plan to try and read about side effects and possible reactions before you try it (be sure to add the word 'canine' or 'dog' so you end up with information specific to dogs).

