

This article was also published in the November 2014 issue of Walkee Talkees and is as relevant now as it was then.

A while ago I had been asked if there was any correlation between the 'cleanliness' of a dog's teeth and the hardness of their drinking water? It was a question which had been brought up during an idle conversation and to be perfectly honest - I hadn't the faintest idea!

Well, the overwhelming consensus was yes; and that not only does the hardness of the water affect the plaque build up on teeth, but the mineral content (in particular iron) of the water can also have a staining effect. Being lucky enough to live in a soft water area; are there any other contributory factors? Is it the addition of fluoride in the drinking water - or could it be a combination of genes and diet?

Certainly in humans it is well documented that while crooked or misaligned teeth are often genetically influenced, the actual health of the teeth and gums is more affected by how they are taken care of, more than any other factor. Eating habits during development of the teeth can also affect the health of teeth. Not having enough calcium in the diet during teeth development may cause the teeth to be weaker and predisposed to cavities. But what contributes to a build-up of plaque?

Dental plaque for dogs can be controlled by various methods; regular brushing with doggy toothpaste, homeopathic medication, raw meaty bones or visits to the vets for cleaning under a general anaesthetic, to name but a few. But does any-one use just filtered or bottled water for their dog's drinking water to keep their teeth clean?

Following on from that initial conversation, a spot of research at the next Ch show revealed (surprisingly) a large number of exhibitors (and not just in keesies) who have obviously spent hours bathing, grooming and preparing their dog for the show ring; only to subsequently show the dog with dirty teeth. Clean teeth are as equally important as a well-groomed coat and not just for a 'beauty competition'!

It's quite off putting being enthusiastically greeted and licked by a dog whose teeth are caked in plaque. More to the point, the resulting gum disease caused by excessive plaque is often the first step towards more serious health issues. As participants in a sport that seems to have the 'spotlight shining constantly on us'; shouldn't we all be setting an example of what essentially boils down to nothing more than basic good animal husbandry?

Since then I have had several reports back from owners who have since changed their dogs' drinking water and over a period of several months have noticed a vast improvement in 'canine dental cleanliness'. For two owners it was as simple as remembering to fill the dog's water bowl from the kitchen filtered water jug as opposed to straight from the tap.

I had taken in two elderly rescues and they both had filthy teeth caked in plaque. Six months of drinking our lovely soft Pennine water together with a few big raw, meaty bones thrown in for good measure and the difference was astonishing. Whilst their teeth will never be white and gleaming, they are now clean and plaque free, along with healthy pink gums and sweeter smelling breath – a vast improvement!!

Undergoing any procedure under a general anaesthetic is not without associated risks and the resulting gum disease caused by excessive plaque is often the first step towards more serious health issues. So if you do live in a hard water area and your dog's teeth aren't as gleaming as you would like; using filtered or bottled water is worth trying.

I remember several of the 'old breeders' (in the days before the availability of water filters etc.) saying that they always collected rain water for their dogs' drinking water - presumably for the same reason. It could turn out to be better for both the health of your dog and your purse!