**Chapter 41: Maintaining Ears, Teeth and Nails & Administering Medication**

**Ears**  
Most Ear infections are caused by bacteria and yeast. Labrador’s ear flaps hang down and air does not circulate in them as well as in dogs with upright ears, like German Shepherds. This creates a warm, moist environment where yeast and bacteria can thrive.

Signs of ear infections include scratching or pawing at the ears, head shaking, very hot ears, brown or black waxy debris found on the gauze pads when cleaning, and a bad smell coming from the ears. If you notice any of these signs, check your dog's ears and see a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Check your dog’s ears at least weekly as a part of your regular routine. If your dog’s ears are generally clean, and no debris buildup is found, thorough cleaning can be done less often.

To check the ears, moisten a piece of gauze or tissue with cleaning solution. Wrap the pad around your finger and gently wipe the inside flap of the ear and down into the canal as far as your finger goes to remove dirt. Many dogs will enjoy this and lean in as you massage the inside of the ear. Due to the L-shaped anatomy of the dog’s ear canal, you cannot reach the eardrum. Usually, the dog will shake its head after you have finished massaging its ear. This is normal and actually helps move debris out of the ear. Check the pad for waxy debris or a foul odor before discarding. If you find the ears to be dirty you will need to perform a thorough cleaning.

To thoroughly clean the ears, tip the bottle of cleaner up to squeeze a small amount directly into the dog’s ear canal. Hold the ear up and massage the base for several seconds. You should hear the cleaning solution moving around in the ear. Release the ear and allow the dog to shake its head, then use a dry gauze or tissue to wipe out as much of the excess cleaning solution and debris as possible. Wipe off the nozzle of the cleaner bottle to avoid cross contamination before repeating the procedure on the second ear. If you find the ears to be excessively dirty for more than two weeks, consult your veterinarian to check if an infection is developing.

Use only a product that is intended for the purpose of cleaning dogs' ears. These are gentle cleansing solutions that also have drying properties and generally will not irritate your dog’s skin. However, some dogs can be sensitive to specific products. Checking the ears regularly is the best way to maintain ear health.

**Teeth**

Brushing your dog's teeth will help keep their teeth and gums healthy and is important to your dog’s overall health. You should only use toothpaste made specifically for dogs. It is generally flavored to help make the experience more enjoyable for the dog. Human toothpaste contains too many chemicals and strong flavors that are not suitable for dogs. There are two basic types of toothbrushes for dogs, a typical small brush head with a plastic handle, or a finger brush with soft plastic bristles that fit directly onto your finger. You can also choose to simply use a piece of gauze wrapped around your finger.

Your dogs have limited experience with teeth brushing and may be resistant at first. Be gentle and start slowly by getting your dog comfortable with having you handle their muzzle and gently slide your finger along the sides of their mouth. If you find your dog to be particularly uncomfortable with the procedure, you may need to do several sessions like this before attempting to brush.

We will begin practicing by using a gauze pad. Wrap the pad around your finger. Gently lift the dog’s lips with your opposite hand and wipe the outer surface of the teeth by keeping your finger parallel to the row of teeth. You only need to clean the outside surface of the teeth, so there is no need to pry the dog’s mouth open. Be very careful not to get your finger pinched in the teeth should the dog start to open and close his mouth. Work for just a few seconds at a time and praise your dog in a calm voice throughout the entire process. Right now, you are just trying to get the dog used to having something in its mouth. You can then progress to using a soft finger brush or toothbrush and dog toothpaste. Most dogs find the taste of the toothpaste enjoyable and will attempt to lick and chew at it as you’re trying to brush. Brushing should be done daily or as often as possible in order to see long term benefits.

**Nails**

Nail trimming is a task best handled by professionals. The nail “quicks” are extremely sensitive and will bleed profusely if the nail is trimmed too short. Trimming can be painful to the dog if done incorrectly and they can easily grow to resent it. That being said, many dogs' nails will remain adequately short if the dog is getting plenty of work on concrete or asphalt surfaces. You may also want to seek out safe play areas on a hard surface to help keep your dog’s nails in check. If your dog is cooperative, you may be able to use a coarse emery board to keep the nails filed smooth. Beyond that, your dog’s nails should only be trimmed by a veterinarian or professional groomer. This should be taken care of at routine vet visits but may be necessary at regular intervals throughout the year depending on the dog. If you begin to hear your dog’s nails clicking on the sidewalk or on the floors in your home, that is an indication that the nails are getting too long and you should seek out assistance in having them trimmed.

**Administering medications**

On occasion, your dog may become ill and need to be treated with medication in the form of a pill or capsule. Some medications may come in a “chewable” that your dog will readily eat, such as heartworm preventatives. Other times, you will need to get your dog to swallow the medication without chewing it. For this exercise, we will practice the technique for giving your dog a non-chewable pill by using Brewer's Yeast tablets. Brewer’s yeast is a natural supplement with minimal nutritional value. Some dogs will offer to eat it willingly, but for today's purposes, we will be attempting to have the dog swallow it without chewing. In any case, it is best to administer medication on a hard surface such as a tile floor, so you can hear if the medication falls out and hits the floor and it will be easier to find if it does.

To pill your dog, it is best to have the dog sitting next to you or between your knees. You can try different methods and learn what works best for you both. Take the pill in your dominant hand, pinched between your thumb and middle finger. Place your other hand gently over the dog's muzzle with your wrist coming over the dog’s forehead. Your thumb should be on one side of the muzzle and fingers on the other. Feel along the sides of the muzzle for small indentations located just behind the dog’s canine teeth on the upper jaw. Pinch your fingers and thumb together and begin to lift up slightly to start opening the dog’s mouth. At the same time, use the finger of your dominant hand (with the pill) to push down on the front of the dog’s lower jaw. As the dog’s mouth opens, push the pill to the back of the dog’s throat as far as possible. There is a small pocket behind the dog’s tongue that you can push the pill into. Once you have deposited the pill, quickly remove your hand and gently hold the dog’s mouth closed, chin up so they cannot spit the pill back out. Position one finger across the very front of the dog’s mouth. At this point, you can gently blow on the dog's nose or massage its throat to encourage swallowing. Feel for the tongue to come out from the front of the mouth a couple of times. Once you feel the tongue, you can be fairly certain that the dog has swallowed the pill. Follow up plenty of praise and a couple of food rewards, especially if you are giving a foul-tasting medication.

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