

DENTAL DISEASE IN DOGS AND CATS

Dental disease can be a serious problem for many pets. Food, saliva, and bacteria accumulates on the surface of the teeth to form a yellow layer of dental plaque. With time the plaque mineralizes to form calculi or tartar. This plaque and tartar promote the growth of bacteria, which leads to infection and destruction of the gums and supporting tissue around the teeth (periodontal disease). The animal will have bad breath and a painful mouth. Sometimes the root of a tooth will become infected and abscessed, and often teeth will fall out. Once tartar has formed, it can be removed only by having the teeth cleaned. The animal is anesthetized, the teeth are cleaned using ultrasonic machine, and then polished. Severely infected teeth are extracted. Very often antibiotics are needed for as long as 3 weeks to treat the infected gums. If careful home care is used, one can prevent future build-up of tartar.

Periodontal disease can often be prevented by following several steps. First, avoid feeding your pet sweets and table scraps. Dry food, biscuits, and safe hard nylon chew toys will help cleanse the teeth. Brushing will help tremendously. If you start when your pet is young he/she will learn to tolerate the process. Use a pediatric soft toothbrush or just a washcloth, with either special veterinary toothpaste, a non-detergent, non-foaming toothpaste such as Peak, or baking soda and warm water. You can rinse with an antiseptic mouthwash if desired; usually water will do. Brush at least several times a week—daily if possible.

Using a metal dental scaler is fine although, if there is much plaque and/or tartar, ultrasonic scaling is necessary. Many of the smaller dog breeds, such as Poodles, Schnauzers, Yorkies, Pomeranians, etc., and some purebred cats will need to have their teeth cleaned professionally once or twice a year as they get older. The time span between cleanings can be lengthened with good routine home dental care.

Pet Dental Care

Pets have dental diseases and problems just like you do. Many of these problems can be avoided by bringing your pet to your veterinarian for regular dental check-ups and dental cleanings.

Signs of Dental Problems

- Bad breath - one of the first signs of dental disease
- A yellowish - brown crust of plaque on the teeth near the gum line
- Red and swollen gums
- Pain or bleeding when your pet eats or when the mouth or gums are touched
- Decreased appetite or difficulty eating
- Loose or missing teeth

Does your pet have bad breath or reddened gums?

If so, it could be from gingivitis. Gingivitis occurs when soft plaque hardens into rough, irritating tartar. Tartar build-up on your pet's teeth can cause damage to the teeth and gums.



Periodontal Disease – Cat



Periodontal Disease – Dog

If left untreated, gingivitis can lead to an infection called periodontal disease. This disease can cause the loss of teeth.



Close-Up of Infected Teeth Associated with Periodontal Disease

You can prevent serious dental problems from happening by making sure your pet receives dental exams at the time of each vaccination, again at six months of age, and then annually.

Dental Cleanings

Veterinary dentistry is quite different from the equivalent process in people. For most of us, caring for our teeth and gums has been part of our daily routine for as long as we can remember. Consequently, a person's visit to the dental hygienist is relatively brief and does not require sedation. In contrast, veterinary dentistry is considerably more involved, time-consuming, and complex. It requires general anesthesia, and the skills of several people, from veterinarians to veterinary technicians and animal attendants.

Pre-dental Workup

A pre-dental workup involves laboratory and diagnostic tests to better evaluate a pet's current health status and to assure safe anesthesia. Current medical problems must be evaluated and any possible unknown problems must be identified prior to dentistry.

For otherwise healthy young animals, we suggest a brief in-hospital blood screen on the day of the dentistry. For older animals, a complete blood count (CBC) and blood chemistry profile can be done the same day of the dentistry. A preoperative electrocardiogram (EKG) may be suggested in certain circumstances.



Teeth Cleaning

Your pet's dental cleaning will begin with a physical examination. This is important to evaluate your pet's general health. After the physical exam, your pet is given anesthesia for a safe and painless sleep during the dental cleaning.

The first part of dental cleaning requires the removal of tartar. This is done with an ultrasonic scaler.



Hand Scaling Dog's Teeth

Next, a periodontal probe checks for pockets under the gumline where periodontal disease and bad breath starts. A mechanical scaler is used to clean above the gumline while a curette cleans and smooths the teeth under the gumline in the crevice.

Your pet's teeth are polished, creating a smooth surface. The gums are washed with an anti-bacterial solution to help delay tartar build-up both under the gumline and on the crown of the tooth.



Polishing of Teeth

Finally, the doctor also administers a fluoride treatment to strengthen your pet's teeth, to desensitize exposed roots, and to decrease infection.

Home prevention

Dental care does not end with a visit to your veterinarian. You need to continue your veterinarian's good work at home. Brushing your pet's teeth is an important part of home dental care. The staff at Parkway Animal Hospital will show you the proper method of brushing your Dog's teeth.

Give your pet a complete dental care

Annual veterinary dental care and home dental care will help keep your pet's breath fresh and gums and teeth healthy. Your pet's smile and healthier life will be equaled by your smile and pride in a job well done.

Dental Care Q & A

1. HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE MY PET'S TEETH CHECKED?

After the examination for any retained "baby teeth" which is performed at six months, your pet should have an annual checkup for dental health when it receives its yearly booster vaccines.

2. DO PETS GET CAVITIES LIKE HUMANS?

Cavities are not as common in pets, but do occur occasionally. Frequently in cats "sublingual caries" may form, when the gum lines have receded excessively, exposing the dentine layer that is much softer than enamel.

3. WHY DOES MY DOG OR CAT HAVE BAD BREATH?

The most common cause of bad breath is excessive tartar deposits on the teeth. Bacteria feed and live in the tartar and produce offensive odors. Tartar is a crusty collection of food

particles, minerals, and bacteria that forms at the tooth/gum borders. However, metabolic diseases such as kidney disease, diabetes, etc. can also produce halitosis.

4. DOES TARTAR ON THE TEETH HURT MY PET?

Yes. As tartar accumulates at the gum line, it causes gum recession and inflammation or gingivitis. This allows bacteria in the tartar to infect and loosen the base of the tooth, causing periodontal disease. In pets, periodontal disease may lead to an infection of the heart (endocarditis) and/or of other organs, as also may occur in people. Inflammation of the gums and infection of the teeth can cause your pet considerable pain, and his/her appetite and general attitude may deteriorate.

5. HOW CAN I PREVENT TARTAR BUILD-UP?

Feed your pet a well-balanced, commercial diet. Brushing the teeth is an excellent way to check tartar build-up, though once hard plaque has developed, your pet may require dentistry. Brushing with C.E.T. flavored toothpaste, which is designed for pets, once daily or at least 2-3 times a week, discourages tartar build-up.

For dogs, Booda bones, Nylabones, or C.E.T. chews, chew toys are also helpful as preventative and also aid in stimulation of the gums. If your pet does not let you brush the teeth, you may use one of the pre-made mouthwashes e.g. C.E.T. AquaDent or Maxi Guard. Alternatively, if you cannot provide maintenance, you may need to have us perform full dental scaling and polishing on a more frequent basis.

6. WHEN IS DENTISTRY REQUIRED?

Dentistry is required when hardened tartar deposits have occurred and/or when periodontal disease is present. It is also required when substantial mouth odor exists, which indicates infection or decay even if it is not readily apparent.

7. HOW LONG WILL THE TEETH REMAIN CLEAN?

This depends on diet, dental alignment, amount of gum recession that has already occurred, and future care of the teeth. Smaller breeds tend to develop tartar much more quickly; in most cases this is a genetic predisposition and not something the owner can readily modify. However, the degree to which the owner provides ongoing dental prophylaxis heavily influences the outcome!