



Dental Health

Periodontal disease is the most common oral disease in dogs and cats. Indeed, It's also the most overlooked disease.

Sometimes pets suffer with severe periodontal disease before anything is done about it.

Unfortunately, if left untreated, periodontal disease only gets worse, until eventually it undermines the general health of you pet. The mouth is said to be the most biologically active area of the body, from a diseased mouth can affect various organs of the body and the nervous system. Investigators believe that certain diseases of feline old age, such as diseases of the kidneys and possibly some diseases of the heart and liver, can be attributed to untreated oral disease. And human medicine has taught us that healthy mouths can help us live longer. There's no reason to believe the same isn't also true for animals.

Owners, however, shouldn't think of mouth care as something to pay attention to only in their pet's later years. Studies show that most pets over the age of 2 years show signs of oral disease to some degree.

Whiff of a Problem

Since cats and dogs are not noted for their cooperation when it comes to mouth inspections, owners can easily miss the early stages of oral disease in their feline companions. There are, however, several signs that, although not exclusive to oral disease, should alert you to the need for a thorough and detailed veterinary examination of your pet's mouth. Bad breath is certainly one "red flag." Other indications are when your pet rejects hard, crunchy food; avoids certain parts of its mouth when eating; paws at its mouth; or begins to drool. We recommend regular veterinary dental checkups as part of your pet's wellness program, which should also include routine physical checkups and booster "shots." Although oral disease is

very common, the good news is that if it is treated early enough - with home brushing and professional prophylactic cleaning - you and your veterinarian can do much to reverse its effects.

Periodontal Disease

Periodontal disease involves the tissue and structures that support the teeth - the gum (gingiva) and the bone (alveolar bone). The disease ranges in severity from inflammation of the gum (gingivitis) to ulceration of the gum and resulting loss of supporting bone structure (periodontitis). Advanced periodontitis leads to the loosening and eventual loss of teeth. Treatment of periodontal disease is the most important aspect of veterinary dentistry.

Gingivitis

Gingivitis, the early stage of periodontal disease, is relatively easy to spot. It appears as a red line of inflammation where the gum meets the tooth. This inflammation of the gingival (gum) tissue is caused by deposits of plaque that build up on the surface of the tooth beneath the gum tissue. Plaque, a combination of bacteria, food particles, and saliva, is constantly forming and hardening on the surface of the tooth. The high concentration of bacteria (80 percent) in plaque makes it an effective pathological (disease-causing) agent.

As plaque deposits build up, they harden into calculus (tartar) and enlarge the pocket (sulcus) between the tooth and the gum. This enlarged sulcus traps debris and creates a fertile environment for bacterial growth. Saliva, which normally washes out the sulcus, can no longer do its job effectively and clear out the sulcus. Multiplying bacteria invade the gingival tissue. The gums become swollen and are liable to bleed when probed. Fortunately, at this early stage, the teeth have not lost their supporting bone structure. So if gingivitis is detected early and treated promptly, its effects are reversible.

When gingivitis is apparent, we are now performing laser surgery to help reduce the gingivitis of the mouth. This procedure is performed during the dental prophylaxes.

Periodontitis

Periodontitis, the advanced stage of periodontal disease, occurs when bacteria, their waste products, and other toxins cause the gums to ulcerate. Over time, an increasing buildup of calculus causes ever-deepening pockets to form around the teeth. Eventually, the alveolar bone begins to erode. Finally, erosion of the gingival and alveolar bone advances to such a degree that the teeth no longer have anything to support them. They become loose and fall out. (These lost teeth are almost always healthy teeth.) Unfortunately, periodontitis is not reversible. But if treated early enough, it can be controlled.

What You Can Do

Plaque forms every 6 to 8 hours. And merely rinsing your pet's mouth will not remove the buildup. To effectively remove plaque, you need to brush your cat's teeth - preferably every day. While brushing takes discipline, it doesn't take a lot of time - no more than 15 to 30 seconds. Admittedly, most cats do not clamor to have their teeth brushed, but most will tolerate it if you set up a routine, stick to it, treat brushing like a game, and always remember to reward your pet afterward.

What Your Vet Can Do

Your veterinarian is also your pet's dentist. Your veterinarian should examine your pet's gums and teeth at least once a year - more often if your pet needs it. (Some dogs and cats build up plaque faster than others.)

To catch problems early, it is essential that the owner and veterinarian work as a team. An observant owner may notice subtle changes in a pet's mouth or behavior that he or she can bring to the veterinarian's attention during a routine checkup. Alerted to potential trouble spots, the vet can schedule time for a detailed oral examination.

Prevention

Prevention is the key to helping pets maintain good oral health. The American Veterinary Dental Society recommends that pet owners follow three important steps:

Visit Your Veterinarian

Just as dental visits are the cornerstone of a human dental program, visiting a veterinarian is the key to ensuring the health of your pet's teeth. A veterinarian will conduct a thorough physical examination of your pet as part of the dental evaluation.

Start a dental care routine at home

Removing plaque regularly from your pet's teeth should be part of your pet's home dental care routine. Ask your veterinarian about the procedure for brushing your pet's teeth. Dog owners also may feed specially formulated dietary foods that help reduce the accumulation of plaque and tartar from teeth when the pet eats. Your veterinarian can offer more information on dietary options.

Get Regular Veterinary Dental Checkups

The family veterinarian needs to monitor the progress of your pet's preventive dental care routine much the same way a dentist monitors your teeth. Regular dental check-ups are essential.

Once a pet's teeth display the warning signs — bad breath, a yellow brown crust of tartar around the gumline, pain or bleeding when the pet eats or when you touch its gums — gum disease may already be present.

For a professional dental check-up, [contact us](#) today!

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Photo of dogs teeth with plaque and tar tar buildup



Notice the dark brownish/yellow buildup and the sore, redness of the gum line.

After dog received a dental treatment



Amazing the difference. The awesome news is that this photo was taken 6 months after this dog received a dental treatment. SIX MONTHS!