

PETS NEED DENTAL CARE TOO!

Since the late 1800's, the average life expectancy for humans has dramatically increased. One of the primary factors driving this phenomenon has been the significant gains made in the practice of dentistry and the increased awareness in the need of good oral hygiene. While most of us make regular dental care a priority for ourselves and our human families, our beloved pets are often overlooked. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show signs of oral disease by age three. Trouble begins when food particles and bacteria build up in the mouth, forming plaque and tartar which if left intact, can result in a host of problems including tooth decay, bad breath, bleeding gums, and, in severe cases, tooth loss. Even more concerning are the large quantities of bacteria that buildup and can enter the bloodstream through the blood vessels in the gums and damage the heart, liver, kidney and lungs.

Symptoms of oral disease in dogs and cats include yellow and brown build-up of tartar along the gum line, reddened gums and persistent bad breath. Broken teeth are a common problem, especially among outdoor pets. Vigorous chewing on hard objects, such as commercially available cow hooves, is a primary cause of broken teeth in dogs.

To prevent serious health problems, owners are asked to follow three simple steps:

Step 1. Take the pet to the veterinarian for a dental exam. Each year, as part of a thorough physical exam, the veterinarian will check the teeth and gums. If plaque and tartar buildup is evident, the veterinarian may recommend a dental cleaning.

Step 2. Start a home care dental routine. An in-home regimen may include regular toothbrushing and specially formulated diets that reduces the accumulation of plaque and tartar.

Step 3. Continue to monitor your pet's oral health on a regular basis and continue regular veterinary dental checkups on a yearly basis.

Today's veterinarians have at their disposal a wide variety of high tech dental instruments and techniques to provide the best in oral care for your pet. Ultrasonic plaque/tartar scalers and motorized dental polishers, like those found in your dentist's office, are utilized to perform the basic dental cleanings. Patients are placed on antibiotics prior to and following dental procedures to drastically reduce the number of potentially damaging oral bacteria. Pain medications following dental extractions and root canals are safe and widely available.

Dental disease is a preventable condition. By providing proper dental care, our pets will thank us not only by their fresher breath, but by their longer lives.

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