

Introduction

Did you know that dental disease is the most prevalent disease in adult pets? In fact, 80% of dogs and 70% of cats over age three have some form of dental disease! Believe it or not, taking care of your pet's teeth is as important as looking after your own. Proper dental care for dogs and cats is critical for their overall health.

Plaque and Tartar

Saliva, bacteria and food particles combine to form plaque every day. Plaque is the film you feel on your teeth in the morning when you wake up. If plaque is not removed from the teeth by daily brushing it then mineralizes in the presence of salivary calcium and forms tartar, a hard brown deposit on the tooth surface. This doesn't disappear with simple brushing of the teeth, but requires scaling by your veterinarian.

Plaque also causes gingivitis (red and swollen gums) and is the first stage of periodontal disease. Gingivitis can lead to a loss of appetite and painful chewing.

Bacteria will gradually destroy the ligaments and bones that support the teeth, and the risk of abscessation is very high. Eventually the tooth will fall out.

At this advanced stage, the bacteria can spread to the lungs, liver, kidney and heart, causing infection there. Periodontal disease is painful, even if your dog or cat may not show it.

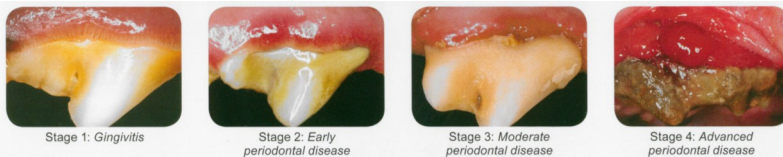
Symptoms of dental problems

Your vet will be able to spot any problems during your pet's check-up, but until then, here are some things to look out for:

- Bad breath
- Excessive salivation or drooling
- Yellow and brown tartar deposits on the teeth – normal teeth should always be white
- A red line along the gum line (gingivitis)
- Difficulty eating
- Bleeding gums

Stages of dental disease

Approximately 80% of dogs show signs of gum disease by the age of three. Periodontal disease has been linked as a risk factor to heart, kidney and liver problems in dogs:



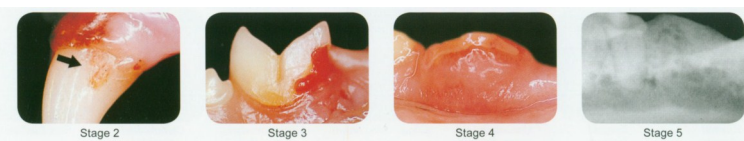
Dogs can also commonly fracture teeth chewing on cage doors, chain-link fences and hard toys:



Approximately 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by age three:



Tooth resorption is the most common cause of tooth loss in cats. These lesions frequently begin below the gum line, so owners don't know there's a problem until teeth are seriously damaged.



What can I do to prevent this

Fortunately, this common disease is usually preventable. There are lots of things that you can do to make sure that your pet maintains healthy teeth and gums. Here are some suggestions:

Learn to check your pet's teeth regularly (including the back teeth). Redness of the gums, a thick build-up of tartar on the teeth, or bad breath all indicate that it's time to see the vet – as soon as possible.

Feed raw bones 2-3 times per week- this is the most natural way to clean the teeth. Chewing through bone and cartilage, and tearing the meat off the bone, exercises and cleans the entire tooth, right up to the gum line. Feeding the bones with some raw meat on is okay, but good hygiene is important. Never feed cooked bones. Cooked bones are less beneficial to the teeth and can create problems such as constipation or even intestinal obstruction. Whilst it is still possible for raw bones to become lodged in your pet's mouth, this is uncommon and easily fixed, so don't be afraid to feed raw bones. You should avoid large hard bones like beef femurs, as well as any split long bones, which can sometimes fracture the teeth.

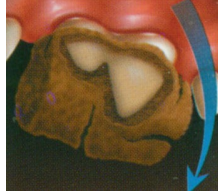
Have your vet check the teeth at least once a year. We will do this as part of your pet's annual examination and vaccination. If necessary, we will recommend appropriate treatment to restore your pet's teeth and gums to good health (see Veterinary Dental Procedures below).

Try brushing your pets teeth. Brushing will be easier if you begin while your pet is still young, although you may have success even if you start with an older dog or cat, provided they don't already have painful gum disease. You should brush your pet's teeth at least once a week, but once a day is best. Call in to see us for a free demonstration on how to brush your pets' teeth and obtain some special pet friendly toothpaste and brushes.

Diet is an important part of dental care. Bones have already been discussed, but many people think that dry food will clean their pet's teeth. It won't because dry foods crumble too readily and clean only the tip of the teeth, not right up to the gum line where the problem lies. Prescription dental diets such as Royal Canin 'Dental' and Hills T/d have been specially formulated to gently abrade the teeth during chewing.



Pet's tooth enters the kibble.



Kibble stays intact longer and begins scrubbing action that removes plaque, the cause of tartar buildup.



The kibble will slowly break apart leaving a cleaner tooth.

In addition, Royal Canin 'Dental' contains sodium polyphosphate which traps calcium in the saliva so mineralisation of plaque into tartar can't occur.

Artificial Chews and Bones. We offer a range of dental chews, from Greenies to low fat treats for animals with sensitive stomachs. Giving dental chews often is highly beneficial—usually at least every second day.

We also stock **antibacterial gels** that kill plaque producing bacteria in the same way Listerine mouth wash does for us. It is suitable for animals that will not chew or allow brushing. It is applied to the teeth and gums either from your fingertip or direct from the bottle.

No one method will be the answer for every pet, but we can help you select the product or combination of products that are best for you and your pet's needs



Veterinary Dental procedures

Sometimes, to give your pet's teeth a clean start, they may need to be scaled and polished. Here is what's involved:

Antibiotics will often be prescribed, to kill the plaque bacteria immediately before, during and after the clean. **Anti-inflammatories** and **pain-relievers** are also given where necessary.

Scaling of the plaque from the tooth is done with an ultrasonic scaler that vibrates and breaks up the tartar without damage to the tooth. All tooth surfaces are carefully scaled, both inside and out. After mechanical scaling is complete, hand scalers are used to complete the removal of plaque and tartar from below the gum line. This is termed root planing and subgingival curettage.

Polishing. After scaling, the tooth can still have a rough surface that allows the re-attachment of plaque. We have a variable speed dental polishing unit and use polishing paste that can restore a smooth healthy surface to the teeth, both above and below the gum line.

Extractions are often required where the tooth cannot be saved. The tooth may be broken, the roots may be rotten, the enamel may be too badly eroded, or the gums, bones and other supporting structures may be too far gone to continue to support the tooth.

Sometimes it is only possible to decide if a tooth can be saved after the tartar has been removed. Occasionally, whether to extract a tooth or try to save it may even be influenced by the owner's ability or willingness to keep the teeth and gums clean at home. Where brushing at home is not possible, it may be better to extract a tooth to ensure the health of the rest of the mouth.

Other procedures include dental X-rays, endodontics, root canal treatments, etc. We can discuss these more advanced procedures and arrange a referral if necessary.

Dental records are kept concerning the procedures performed. A free re-check will generally be scheduled 5 days after the procedure, and again after 3-12 months, depending on our examination findings.

How to brush your pet's teeth

It is best to get your pet used to having their teeth brushed from an early age. Even though the milk teeth are soon replaced by permanent teeth, brushing from this early age will ensure that they get used to the routine and will make brushing easier when the adult teeth appear.

Some other words of advice that may help in brushing your pet's teeth:

- Stand beside rather than in front of the animal.
- Use a toothbrush or finger brush of the right size for your animals mouth.
- Only use toothpaste that is specially formulated for animals.
- Start off slowly....brush just a few teeth at a time, then gradually increase the number of teeth you clean over time.
- Start by brushing the outsides of the tooth, moving to the inside of the teeth once the animal is comfortable with the process.
- Always brush with caution. Even the nicest pet may bite if aggravated by an owner brushing its teeth!
- Most importantly, praise your pet after cleaning its teeth, and reward with a treat such as a walk or cuddle.

- Our Dentipet Starter Kit contains four different types of toothpaste (beef, chicken, cheese and biscuit flavour), along with a finger brush. Why not try all four to see which is your pet's favourite flavour?

