



WHY YOU SHOULD CARE FOR YOUR PET'S TEETH

Everyone can understand the importance of dental care for their pets, because the risk of gingivitis and periodontal disease is the same for animals as it is for people. There is no reason to believe that animals do not feel the same pain of sore gums and a toothache that we feel. So, the main reason to care for your pet's teeth is to prevent pain.

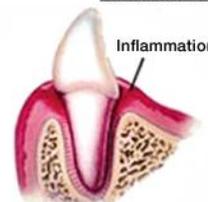
If you never brushed your teeth, your mouth would be sore and you would have trouble eating. You might feel tired all the time because the infection in your mouth would spread throughout your body. The exact same thing happens in your pet's mouth. The mouth is the door to the rest of the body. It has a very good immune system to protect it against the constant barrage of bacteria and toxins it deals with every minute. But it needs some help. We must keep it clean of the plaque that is constantly forming on the teeth.

Plaque is a clear, thick substance consisting of saliva, bacteria, and food particles. In fact, plaque is 80% bacteria and forms within 6-8 hours after brushing. It sticks to the teeth and collects in the pockets around the teeth. **If not removed, an infection will result.** This infection will eventually overwhelm the body's immune system.

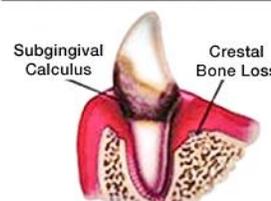
Signs of gingivitis and periodontal disease:

- *Bad Breath*
- *Gums swollen or red, may bleed*
- *Brownish-yellow calculus (tartar) on teeth*
- *Difficulty chewing or eating*
- *Drooling*
- *Dropping food from the mouth*
- *Receded gums*
- *Loose or missing teeth*
- *Reduced appetite or refusal to eat*
- *Weight loss*

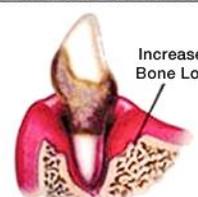
GINGIVITIS



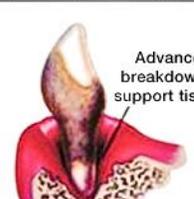
EARLY PERIODONTITIS



MODERATE PERIODONTITIS



ADVANCED PERIODONTITIS



Periodontal Disease in Pets

Periodontal disease is the most common dental condition in dogs and cats – by the time your pet is 3 years old, he or she will very likely have some early evidence of periodontal disease, which will worsen as your pet grows older if effective preventive measures aren't taken. Early detection and treatment are critical, because advanced periodontal disease can cause severe problems and pain for your pet.

Periodontal disease doesn't just affect your pet's mouth. Other health problems found in association with periodontal disease include kidney, liver, and heart muscle changes.

It starts with plaque that hardens into tartar. Tartar above the gum line can often easily be seen and removed, but plaque and tartar below the gum line is damaging and sets the stage for infection and damage to the jawbone and the tissues that connect the tooth to the jaw bone. Periodontal disease is graded on a scale of 0 (normal) to 4 (severe). The treatment of periodontal disease involves a thorough dental cleaning and x-rays may be needed to determine the severity of the disease. Your veterinarian or a board-certified veterinary dentist will make recommendations based on your pet's overall health and the health of your pet's teeth, and provide you with options to consider.

Your veterinarian is your pet's dentist, as well as medical doctor. Ask if you have any questions about the health of your pet's mouth. We may recommend that the teeth be cleaned and polished. **Scaling will remove the plaque and tartar buildup. Polishing will smooth the surface of teeth to discourage plaque buildup.** Modern veterinary dentistry allows us to safely anesthetize most pets to clean the teeth. Depending on your ability to brush the teeth, **your pet may need its teeth professionally cleaned every 6 months to one year.**

Why does dentistry require anesthesia?

When you go to the dentist, you know that what's being done is meant to help you and keep your mouth healthy. Your dentist uses techniques to minimize pain and discomfort and **can ask you how you are feeling**, so you accept the procedures and do your best to keep still. Your pet does not understand the benefit of dental procedures, and he or she reacts by moving, trying to escape, or even **biting**.

Anesthesia makes it possible to perform the dental procedures with less stress and pain for your pet. In addition, anesthesia allows for a better cleaning because your pet is not moving around and risking injury from the dental equipment. If radiographs (x-rays) are needed, your pet needs to be very still in order to get good images, and this is unlikely without heavy sedation or anesthesia.

Although anesthesia will always have risks, it is safer now than ever and continues to improve so that the risks are very low and are far outweighed by the benefits. Most pets can go home the same day of the procedure, although they might seem a little groggy for the rest of the day.

What about anesthesia-free dental cleanings?

The American Veterinary Medical Association, American Animal Hospital Association, and American Veterinary Dental College do not recommend dental cleanings without anesthesia because they do not allow cleaning or inspection below the gum line, where most dental disease occurs, and can result in injury to the pet or the person performing the procedure.

What can I do at home for my pet's oral health?

Prevention of the most common oral disease in pets consists of frequent removal of the dental plaque and tartar that forms on teeth that are not kept clean. Regularly brushing your pet's teeth is the single most effective thing you can do to keep their teeth healthy between dental cleanings, and may reduce the frequency or even eliminate the need for periodic dental cleaning by your veterinarian. Daily brushing is best, but it's not always possible and brushing several times a week can be effective. Most dogs accept brushing, but cats can be a bit more resistant—patience and training are important.

There are many pet products marketed with claims that they improve dental health, but not all of them are effective. Talk with your veterinarian about any dental products, treats, or dental-specific diets you're considering for your pet, or ask your veterinarian for their recommendation. The best defense against plaque is **regular brushing at home in combination with professional scaling and polishing.**