



Dental Disease Prevention and Home Care:

Why is dental care important?

According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80% of dogs and 50% of cats will have some stage of periodontal disease by the age of 3. Periodontal disease, more commonly known as dental disease, can have negative effects to more than just the animals' oral health. Dental disease can affect the heart, blood, and kidneys. Chronic inflammation and infection caused by dental disease can exacerbate previously existing conditions such as Cushing's disease, valley fever, hypothyroidism, diabetes, or autoimmune disorders.

Who is at risk for periodontal disease?

EVERY pet is prone to developing dental disease. Certain factors such as breed, age, and genetics can play a part in how fast the disease progresses. Smaller and brachycephalic (squish faced) breeds tend to be more prone to developing dental issues. Your veterinarian should examine your pet's teeth annually to determine what treatments are needed.

What are the signs/symptoms of dental disease?

The first sign owners notice for possible dental disease is bad breath. Contrary to popular belief, "dog breath" is NOT normal. Plaque, bacteria, and infection can all be factors leading to bad breath. Reluctance to eat or anorexia (not eating) can be signs of dental disease. Calculus, or tartar, is most often noted on the large molars on the top and bottom jaw. Loose or discolored teeth and red, inflamed gums are also common signs. Annual veterinary exams are recommended to help determine if and when your pet needs a dental cleaning.

Ok, my pet has dental disease. What do I do now?

In order to treat dental disease and improve oral health, your veterinarian will most likely recommend a dental cleaning. It is important we remove any plaque and calculus already present, and remove any teeth that have advanced bone loss or infection. Dental cleanings are done under general anesthesia; we take full mouth radiographs (x-rays) to determine if any teeth are diseased under the gumline. After extracting any diseased teeth, the remaining teeth are cleaned, polished, and treated with fluoride. Once the teeth have been cleaned, owners have a "clean slate" to provide home care treatments. This can lengthen the time needed between dentals or even eliminate the need for dental cleanings altogether!

What treatments are available?

Prevention is first and foremost the most important factor to treat dental disease. Home care is vital in ensuring your pet's teeth remain healthy for their entire life. There are several options available for home care:

Brushing: Just as with our teeth, daily brushing is the best option. It is important to get your pet used to having their teeth brushed so it becomes a fun and relaxing part of your routine. Start by simply rubbing your finger along the outside surface of your pet's teeth. Applying something yummy (like peanut butter or spray cheese) to your finger gives them a "treat" while getting used to having their mouths handled. Next, use a damp washcloth or gauze square and gently massage their teeth and gums. Slowly introduce the toothbrush, then toothpaste into your routine. If at anytime your pet becomes stressed, back down to the previous step and always remember to reward/praise your pet through the whole process. If at anytime you are in danger of being bitten by your pet, do NOT attempt to brush their teeth! Your safety is important!

Dental Diets: There are several dental specialist approved diets that can help improve your pet's oral health. Below is a link to the Veterinary Oral Health Council website that has tested and approved many veterinary dental products. They have sifted through the thousands of products to determine which ones actually work.

Dental Treats: Many dental treats are available to help improve oral health. We recommend OraVet chews for dogs. They contain Delmopinol: an ingredient that coats the teeth which prevents bacteria from sticking, therefore plaque and calculus cannot form. They also help to "scrub" the teeth clean, are 100% digestible, and leave a fresh vanilla mint scent! For cats, we recommend Tartar Shield Dental cat treats or Greenies Dental cat treats. They are designed to remove plaque and calculus, and cats love them! Many more options are listed on the VOHC website as well.

Sprays/Gels/Additives: Many products such as sprays, gels, or water and food additives are also available for use. Each product is different, so please discuss with your veterinarian to determine which product will be best for your pet.

Veterinary Oral Health Council: www.VOHC.org (accepted products link)