

## Dental Disease in Dogs and Cats



According to the American Veterinary Dental Society by 3 years of age 80% of Dogs show signs of oral disease and is the most common problem treated in most small animal clinics today.

Dog or cat bad breath is the most common sign of oral disease. Classic "doggy breath" is not necessarily normal. The major cause of bad breath can be periodontal disease. This is an infection of the gums and possibly the other supporting structures of the teeth. Plaque builds up every day on the tooth surface at the gum line. The plaque can mineralize, or harden, in less than 2 days, forming hard calculus or tartar. The tartar

will stick to the tooth surface forming a scaffold for more plaque accumulation. The continued build-up of tartar both above and below the gum line can become a habitat for certain types of bacteria to grow and flourish, with the potential of circulating in your pet's bloodstream and affecting other organs such as the heart, lungs, and kidneys.

There are several Products that can be purchased to help you deal with doggie breath including dog toothbrush and toothpaste, chews, and dog treats that can help minimize tartar or freshen dog breath. But it is first important to treat any underlying diseases that may be causing the foul odor.

There are other signs of dental disease in your pet that may be more subtle. Pain in the pet's mouth may cause them to seek out softer foods, play with chew toys less, and decline crunchy treats. You may notice your pet chewing more on side of his mouth to avoid painful areas. He may chew less in general and this sometimes causes the dog to vomit, seen as undigested, poorly chewed food. Increased salivation, pawing at or rubbing the face can be indications of oral pain.

### **Gingivitis (inflammation of the gums)**

Gingivitis is the inflammation of the gum tissue, which can result in redness and or swollen gums. And is most commonly caused by dental plaque along the gum line. Plaque results when bacteria normally found in the mouth mix with the proteins and starches found in saliva to produce a gritty material that adherer to the teeth. Plaque eventually turns into tarter, which accumulates on the teeth, especially at the gum line. Gingivitis may also lead to periodontal disease or inflammation around the tooth root, which in turn can lead to tooth loss.

Gingivitis is reversible, as the inflammation will go away once the cause of the inflammation is resolved. Once the gingiva, or



Right side before dental cleaning

gums, begins to be lost, periodontal disease is present. Gingival recession is permanent. With gum loss, comes exposure of the root surface of the tooth. The root surface is rougher than the crown of the tooth and is therefore more likely to accumulate plaque.

Periodontal disease (inflammation of the tissue that surrounds the tooth)

Periodontal disease is the inflammation of the structures that support the teeth and is caused by bacteria that make up plaque and is one of the most common infectious diseases in dogs.

Periodontal disease is the source of the bacteria that can cause many other diseases and problems. Small amounts of the same bacteria are released into the bloodstream when our pets chew and when we brush our pet's teeth.

### **Abscessed tooth or teeth**

Periodontal disease can lead to abscessed teeth, bone loss and eventually jaw fracture. Some cases may develop a lump under the eye above the infected tooth.

### **Foreign bodies in the mouth (such as plant matter, hair, or other objects)**

When dogs and cats chew on objects or on themselves, fibers, plant material, hair and other objects become stuck in between the teeth and cause irritations, infections, and abscesses can occur. The pet's breath may worsen as the material becomes rotten.

Prevention of Dental Disease requires a joint effort on the part of your Veterinarian and you, the pet owner through routine dental examinations and Dental cleanings.

See your Veterinarian to seek out the cause of your pet's bad breath. A comprehensive dental examination requires anesthesia. Larger breeds usually require once-a-year dental exams; smaller breeds twice a year. Complete exams are important to maintaining good dental health. If needed your

Veterinarian will recommend performing a Dental cleaning on your pet.



### **Performing a Dental Cleaning on your Pet**

A complete dental cleaning will require your pet to be under anesthesia in order to do the procedure thoroughly and safely. A highly trained Veterinary Technician will assist your Veterinarian with this procedure. Your Veterinarian will first examine your pet to get an estimate of the extent of dental disease and state of your pet's overall health. A pre Anesthetic Blood Test may be needed.

Your pet will then be administered a safe anesthetic and a cuffed endotracheal tube will be placed to protect your pet's airway and deliver needed oxygen and gas anesthetic. Your pet's heart rate, respiratory rate, and oxygen level will be monitored while under anesthesia.

Each tooth will be evaluated for infection, looseness, gingival pockets, fractures, attachment loss, and other pathology. Any

abnormalities in the mouth will be evaluated and addressed. X-rays may be taken if required.

The large tarter deposits will b removed with hand instruments. Then an ultrasonic scaler will be used to remove the finer particles. Once the plaque and tarter are removed then the teeth can be better evaluated for the true extent of the disease. A dental probe will be used to explore the depth of any gingival pockets that may harbor dangerous bacteria.

These gingival pockets will be cleaned out (gingival root planning) and an antibiotic gel may be applied to the pocket.

Once the teeth are clean and any abnormalities addressed, then they will be polished to provide a nice smooth surface that the calculus will have a harder time adhering to the teeth. If desired Fluoride can be applied to the teeth. This can help with dematerialized areas of enamel and decrease the sensitivity of areas of missing enamel or root sensitivity and also has some antibacterial properties.

A dental sealant may be applied if desired. A home care kit is available to be used weekly. This will help reduce the amount of tarter that adheres to the teeth and will inhibit plaque from returning.

Proper dental care for our pets is important to continue at home. Once the pets' teeth are cleaned and pathology addressed, then a good dental regime at home is needed. Dental toys treats chews and specially formulated foods are available to help. Most of them have a mild abrasive action to help wipe away the thin layer of proteins before it turns into hard tarter. Look for the Veterinary Oral Health Counsel (VOHC) seal of approval.

The most important part of dental home care is brushing your pets' teeth with specially formulated toothpaste for our pets. Contact your Veterinarian and speak with one of the trained technicians about home dental care for your pet, and how to teach them to have their teeth brushed.



Before



After