

DENTAL CARE

It is important for you to have good dental hygiene and visit the dentist regularly but did you know it is important for your pet too? Dental disease is one of the most common problems in cats and dogs. Plaque and tartar build-up can cause swelling and pain which can progress to severe gum disease if left untreated.

Signs of a dental problem include:

- Bad breath
- Swollen or bleeding gums
- Excessive drooling
- Visible teeth discolouration
- Loss of appetite or difficulty eating which may also cause weight loss
- Painful around face or muzzle



What Causes Dental Disease?

When your pet eats, an invisible sticky layer of bacteria, food, saliva and other particles, forms over the tooth enamel. This is known as plaque and is what we feel first thing in the morning before we brush our teeth. As your pet cannot brush their own teeth and without regular cleaning, their teeth can become covered in a build up of plaque which produces acid and toxins that attack teeth and gums until eventually the plaque hardens and calcifies to form tartar.

Tartar accumulation can lead to gingivitis - inflamed gums caused by the toxins produced by plaque bacteria. Bacteria is detected by your pet's immune system which reacts by releasing enzymes to break down gum tissue. This leads to inflamed gums, diseased teeth, tooth abscesses, tooth loss and in severe cases bacteria can enter the bloodstream and travel to the heart and kidneys.

Treatment and Prevention

Prevention is key and so we recommend introducing a dental routine at home early in your pet's life but if your pet is older there can still be a significant benefit to starting one. The gold standard is teeth brushing but this can also be combined with other methods such as diet and dental toys for optimum compliance and benefit.

Regular dental checks with the vet are key and if we feel your pet will benefit from specific dental treatment, we will discuss this with you. This may include treatment under a general anaesthetic where we can examine every tooth individually, both visually and with a special probe. During this time we can remove any loose or damaged teeth and remove any tartar or plaque as part of a final scale and polish. An anaesthetic is required as what we see in the conscious animal is only the tip of the iceberg and full disease isn't discovered until they are asleep. This also means that we can protect their airway from any debris and they do not feel any pain or discomfort during the procedure.





Home Dental Care

- Tooth brushing - The most effective way to look after your pet's teeth is to brush them daily using a children's or finger toothbrush with specially designed pet toothpaste. It may take some time for them to get used to this so be patient - it will be worth it in the long run!
- Diet - Feeding a dry or partially dry diet will help to clean the surface of the teeth and prevent plaque or tartar accumulation. Some companies manufacture complete and balanced foods that specifically target dental care, if you are interested in these we would be happy to discuss this with you.
- Dental chews and toys - Some products are designed to remove plaque or tartar through the action of chewing but please ensure you purchase the correctly sized product for your pet.
- Dental wipes - Use of these removes plaque and many contain plaque control agents.
- Cotton buds - These can be used to partially wipe away daily accumulations surrounding the gum line. Cats are more cooperative when these dipped in tuna water first!

How To Brush Your Pet's Teeth

1. Start off by purchasing toothpaste specially made for pets – never use toothpaste made for humans as these are not designed to be swallowed and can be toxic
2. Introduce your pet to the taste of the toothpaste by allowing them to lick the paste off your finger or brush for 5-7 days
3. Once they are used to this, gently rub some paste around their gums using your finger, starting with the canines and working to the back teeth. At this point you can start to introduce the brush and continue with this for 7-10 days.
4. Finally you should be able to brush their teeth. You should aim to gently brush the outside surfaces of all teeth to remove plaque by brushing in a circular motion with the brush angled at 45 degrees (upwards for the upper teeth and downwards for the lower teeth). Remember to also include the gum line!

Summary

We recommend an oral health check for your pet check at least every 6-12 months. Dental disease is progressive and won't go away without help, therefore preventative measures are important. During a check, the vet will gently examine their teeth and gums to ensure there are no signs of disease or decay. We can also use a special light to identify any of the invisible sticky plaque and determine how well preventative measures are working. If you would like to discuss your pet's dental health then please contact the practice for advice or book you pet in for a check.

