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Dental Edition

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Dental Disease

Most people are very aware of their own teeth. We are subject to a constant barrage of information regarding plaque control, cavity prevention, and the catastrophic effects of bad breath. Many of us also visit our own dentist regularly. Despite this awareness of human dentistry, many pet owners still do not realize that their pets are subject to the same dental concerns.

Why is it important to care for your pets' teeth? For exactly the same reasons it is important to care for your own. The most common disease in pet animals is periodontal disease. It affects 85% of cats and dogs over the age of three years. Periodontal disease is the result of bacterial infection of the structures that support the teeth. As it progresses, these structures weaken, leading to

loose and lost teeth. As the animal chews its food, the infected and inflamed gums bleed, and a shower of aggressive bacteria enters the blood stream. These germs are carried throughout the body and can cause infection in many areas.

Some of the diseases that have been documented as associated with periodontal disease include kidney, liver and heart disease. With the immune system challenged by oral bacteria, it is less able to respond to other invasions. Mouths with periodontal disease are sore so animals do not chew their food as well and may have a hard time digesting it properly, and can suffer from malnutrition. The overall effect is that the quality and quantity of life suffers dramatically.

What can you do about dental disease? The first

step is to have your veterinarian do an oral examination as soon as possible. Your pet's mouth will be assessed and a treatment plan formulated. This will usually involve a professional cleaning and polishing of the teeth, and may involve some extractions. Once the teeth are clean you will be instructed in home-care.



DOES MY PET FEEL DENTAL PAIN?

Many owners will say that their pet does not exhibit signs of pain, even when there is an obvious problem. This is not surprising when we think about how dogs and cats act in the wild. As predators, they will often select a weak or distressed animal as an easy meal. If they reveal to the world that they are in pain, or ill, they stand a good chance of being eaten themselves. Also, if they allow dental pain to keep them from eating they soon grow too

weak to hunt and then starve. So, instead, they tend to put up with the pain and carry on.

Studies have shown that dogs and cats have pain thresholds and tolerances almost identical to humans. This means if something hurts you, it would hurt your pet to the same degree and in the same way. If you have ever had a tooth ache, you know the meaning of pain.

Dogs and cats use their mouths for many of the

same essential and recreational functions that we use our hands. This means that their teeth are as important to them as our fingers are to us. A pet with a sore mouth and missing teeth faces both physical and emotional challenges.

The keys to a healthy mouth and a happier pet are; be aware of what problems can arise, take steps to prevent them and treat them as soon as they are noticed.



What is Periodontal Disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection caused by the bacteria found in dental plaque. As your pet eats, food particles accumulate on and between tooth surfaces, and plaque then forms. It often begins with discoloration on the teeth.

Without regular dental cleanings, this plaque builds up and turns into tartar. Tartar can dig into the gums, where bacteria can become trapped and cause infection. If

left unchecked, periodontal disease can lead to serious pain, infection and tooth loss.

The gum tissue has an extensive blood supply, so the infection can also result in bacteria entering the bloodstream and damaging other organs and body systems in your pet, leading to kidney, liver and heart disease. It can also complicate other underlying diseases such as diabetes or chronic sinusitis.

Did you know...

- Dental disease is the most common disease in pets today
- Over 85% of pets three years and older have periodontal disease
- Brushing your pet's teeth regularly can increase their life span by 3-5 years
- The main cause of bad breath in pets is dental disease

Dogs and cats have the same nerve supply to their teeth as people do and feel the same degree of pain. Would your mouth feel comfortable if it looked the same as your pet's?

Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions (FORL's)

One of the most common and most painful afflictions in cats is a condition referred to as Neck Lesions (the proper name is Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions or FORL's). They appear as holes in the enamel and underlying dentin of the teeth, arising at or below the gumline.

FORL's are the result of the cat's own body resorbing the teeth, and the cause has not yet been determined.

FORL's are a progressive destruction of the tooth, and are extremely painful.

Once the defect reaches through the enamel and into the dentin, the tooth experiences increased sensitivity to heat, cold and touch. These teeth are often so sensitive that even a fully anesthetized patient will react when the lesion is probed.

Once the lesion extends into the pulp chamber of the tooth, it is not only very painful, but bacteria in the mouth now have easy access to the tip of the tooth root where an abscess can develop. This can lead to infections on the

heart valves, in the liver, kidneys, spleen, joints, bones and central nervous system.

Dental x-rays are used to determine whether or not the affected tooth needs extraction.

Many owners of cats with neck lesions report that their cats do not appear to be in pain, but improvement in attitude after treatment of these painful teeth is often dramatic.

1 in 7 Cats with Dental Disease have Feline AIDS or Feline Leukemia



Studies have shown a significant relationship between Feline AIDS/Feline Leukemia and dental disease. Over 14% of cats with dental disease tested positive for one or both of these diseases. That's more than twice the incidence in the general feline population.

For that reason, every cat with dental disease should be tested for Feline AIDS and Feline Leukemia. This test can be easily done at the same time as their pre-anesthetic bloodwork, and you can rest easily knowing your cat is safe.

Everything I know I learned from my cat.
When you're hungry, eat.
When you're tired, nap in a sunbeam.
When you go to the vet's, pee on your owner.

Q & A

Why should I brush my dog's or cat's teeth?

Daily removal of plaque is the key to an oral hygiene program. Unless your pet's teeth are brushed daily, plaque, which is an accumulation of bacteria, will build up at the gum line. Eventually calculus forms, further irritating the gums, and then infection progresses to loosen and destroy the attachment of the tooth.

How often does my pet need to have their teeth cleaned by the veterinarian?

It depends on the degree of plaque and tartar accumulation. You need to examine your pet's teeth

monthly. Look for an accumulation of yellow or brown material at the area where the tooth meets the gumline, especially over the cheek teeth and canines. Once you notice plaque or tartar accumulation, it is time for a professional cleaning. Do not wait.

The intervals between teeth cleaning procedures will depend on how often you brush your pet's teeth, and what other home care options you use.

Do you have to use anesthesia to clean my pet's teeth?

Anesthesia is necessary when performing teeth cleaning on pets. Anesthesia

provides three important functions: immobilization in order to clean below the gum line, pain control, and the ability to place a tube in the windpipe, so bacterial products do not enter the respiratory system.

I am concerned about the anesthesia. Is it safe?

We take every effort to provide safe anesthesia. Dogs and cats are given pre-anesthetic tests to qualify them for anesthesia, and are kept on IV fluids during the procedure. All patients are monitored by highly trained technicians while under anesthesia, using similar monitoring devices used in human hospitals.



“You don't have to brush all the teeth, only the ones you want to keep.”

Know the Signs of Dental Disease

If you notice any of these signs of dental disease in your pet, a trip to see your veterinarian is necessary as soon as possible.

- Persistent bad breath
- Build-up of yellow or brown tartar
- Red, irritated, swollen or bleeding gums
- Pain when eating or pawing at the mouth
- Loose or missing teeth
- Change of eating or chewing habits
- Pawing at the mouth
- Excessive salivation
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Difficulty eating or chewing
- Facial swelling
- Depression, irritability
- Favoring one side of the mouth
- Reluctance to chew toys

Even if your pet doesn't show these signs, some problems might not be as obvious, and could become more severe as your pet ages.

Factors that Contribute To Dental Disease

Poor Oral Hygiene: Without proper preventative care, plaque and tartar can lead to gingivitis and periodontal disease.

Breed: Overcrowded or misaligned teeth are more often a problem for smaller breeds of dogs and can predispose them to periodontal disease.

Food: Feeding your pet sticky food may lead to a more rapid accumulation of plaque.

Age: Dental disease occurs more commonly as pets get older, especially if they have not received adequate dental care.

“If you think your dog can't count, try putting three biscuits in your pocket and only giving him two.”



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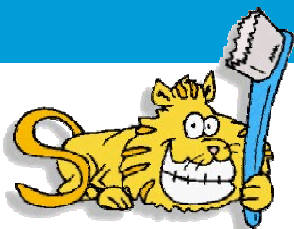
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Follow the 3
D's:

Daily
Brushing

Dentistry

Diet



Hills T/D Dental Diet

Did you know that there are ways to keep your pet's teeth clean and disease free at home? While brushing your pet's teeth is the gold standard in home dental care, not everyone has the time (or patience) to do this, and some pets just may not allow it. The next best thing in home care is as simple as feeding your pet! There are many pet food companies that offer a "dental" formula, but Baywood Animal Hospital recommends Hill's Prescription Diet t/d Formula. The larger-sized kibbles are designed to remove plaque and tartar from the teeth as your pet bites into them—acting much like a toothbrush at every meal. It is a complete and balanced diet meant for long-term feeding, and provides maximum benefit if fed exclusively.

T/d is the perfect maintenance diet for most healthy pets, and you would be hard pressed to find a cat or dog that doesn't like it! If you think your pet could benefit from a healthier, cleaner mouth, don't hesitate to contact our friendly staff at Baywood Animal Hospital to get a sample bag of t/d for your cat or dog!

If..

If you can start the day without caffeine,
If you can get going without pep pills,
If you can always be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains,
If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles,

If you can eat the same food everyday and be grateful for it,
If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time,
If you can overlook it when those you love take it out on you when, for no fault of yours, something goes wrong,

If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,
If you can ignore a friend's limited education and never correct him,
If you can resist treating a rich friend better than a poor friend,

If you can face the world without lies and deceit,
If you can conquer tension without medical help,
If you can relax without liquor, If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,
If you can say honestly that deep in your heart you have no prejudice against creed, color, race or politics,

Then, my friend, you are almost as good as your dog.

Tips on Brushing your Pet's Teeth

Introduce a brushing program gradually. You want to make this fun for your pet, and training may take days or weeks.

1. At first, dip your finger into beef bouillon for a dog or tuna water for a cat, and rub your finger over the pet's gums and teeth.
2. Make these initial sessions brief and positive.
3. Introduce gauze on your finger with the same beef

or tuna flavor and begin rubbing the teeth and gums in a circular motion.

4. Before graduating to a soft



bristle toothbrush, put a small amount of toothpaste specifically designed for pets on your finger and allow the pet to taste it.

5. Apply a small amount of pet toothpaste on a moist toothbrush or finger brush and allow your pet to lick the bristles. Begin brushing at a 45 degree angle away from the gumline.
6. For optimum dental health, brush at least once daily.