



DENTAL HYGIENE

Cats & dogs seldom develop tooth cavities as do humans. However, the dental problem that we find in pets is considered far worse than cavities. It is called “**PERIODONTAL DISEASE**” and it causes severe infections of the gums, bone, and other tissues around the teeth, instead of the teeth themselves.

About 75% of all dental problems are serious enough to be seen by a veterinarian and are the result of periodontal disease. It is the cause of 95% of all cases of “bad breath.” In advanced cases, it results in infected, foul-smelling, loosened teeth; with a massive, unsightly accumulation of tartar. Often there is no outward signs of the dental disease or pain, and only an oral exam can determine if the problem exists.

Food material, bacteria, and saliva accumulate and adhere to the tooth surface, forming a soft “plaque.” This material can be easily removed at this point. However, if buildup is allowed to continue, it mineralizes to become tartar or calculus. The tartar buildup will then push into the gums and jaw bone, forcing bacteria into the surrounding tissue. The teeth then become loose and will require extraction to prevent more serious complications. The gums become reddened, swollen, and may bleed easily.

The buildup of this material allows bacteria to constantly grow in the infected mouth tissue. Depending on the location of the teeth, abscesses can form that can push the eyeball out (retrobulbar abscess), erode into the sinuses, or fracture the jaw. These bacteria may also enter the bloodstream through the bleeding gums; and cause such problems as: **heart valve infections** (endocarditis), **liver disease** (hepatitis), **kidney infections** (nephritis), and **pneumonia**.

In addition to the above medical problems, the pet will have a bad mouth odor and will experience chronic pain. While dogs and cats are very good at not showing outward signs of pain, anyone who has had a tooth ache can imagine what it must feel like to have a mouth full of infected teeth.

Dental cleaning may need to be done every 6-12 months in some pets. This requires general anesthesia and is priced according to severity of disease. Once tartar is established, a cleaning will be necessary before starting any preventive measures, such as brushing or dental treats.

Here are some tips to prevent periodontal disease:

1. Feed at least some hard food, which will provide a cleaning action. Prescription Diet t/d is available for both dogs and cats and can be used as a treat every day. It has been shown that if you decrease your pet’s diet by 20% and replace it at the end of the day with t/d kibbles, it will have similar results as daily brushing.
2. Have teeth examined at least once every year for tartar buildup. Pets vary considerably in the amount of tartar that accumulates.
3. Use of approved chews such as CET Chews, Nylabones, Greenies, and Dental Kongs are also very helpful.
4. Use a pet dentrifice and brush on a regular basis. Human toothpaste should not be used since it can be toxic if swallowed by your pet and they rarely will like the taste.

These recommendations will probably do more to prolong your pet’s life and make it more enjoyable than anything else you can do!

