



# Feline Dental Health

## ***Increase your cat's livelihood with good oral hygiene!***

Your cat obviously has teeth, but do you know how to keep them healthy? When was the last time you looked in your cat's mouth to see if they have tartar or plaque build up? Have you noticed they have bad breath and have a hard time eating or cannot hold kibble in their mouth?

An oral exam is crucial to helping your cat live a long and happy life. At their annual exam, every cat receives an oral exam. During this procedure, their veterinarian examines their gums, mouth, and teeth, looking for abnormalities or signs of infection and pain. Unlike their canine companions, cats are not voracious chewers, and are more likely to accumulate plaque and tartar. This leads to gingivitis and other dental complications. As a pet owner, it is your job to ensure their teeth stay clean through routine oral care.

One of the easiest ways to help your cat maintain good oral health is through feeding them hard food, which deters tartar build up and plaque accumulation. You can also try brushing your cat's teeth with a cat toothbrush. This is very beneficial to their overall health, and it helps remove plaque and decreases tartar. There are also numerous treats that assist in feline oral hygiene. Other than growing their adult teeth, kittens do not have much going on in their mouth. Young adults (5 months – 2 years), however, will start developing plaque and calculus. As they age, this build up can lead to increased oral bacteria and the risk of periodontal or gum disease. Cats can also develop gingivostomatitis, oral tumors, and resorptive lesions that can be painful and uncomfortable to your pet.

Inadequate oral care in cats can lead to liver, kidney, and heart disease, because bacteria from the mouth enters the bloodstream. Cats that have FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus) or FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), are predisposed to dental disease, because they have a harder time keeping their mouths healthy. Both FeLV and FIV are retroviruses that affect a cat's immunity, and lower their abilities to fight infection. If your cat has dental problems or goes outside they should be tested for either FeLV or FIV. IDEXX Laboratories recently performed a study that revealed nearly 1 in 7 cats (14.3%) that have a dental disease or health problems tested positive for retroviruses. The study also revealed 1 in 4 cats (23.9%) who suffered from gingivostomatitis were positive for retroviruses.

## ***Periodontal Disease & Gingivitis***

Periodontal disease, gingivitis, gingivostomatitis, and feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions (FORLs) are the most common dental complications that come with inadequate feline oral care. Gingivitis is the inflammation of gums and is the precursor to periodontal or gum disease. Foul breath and redness in the gums adjacent to teeth are signs of gingivitis. As this progresses, the gums recede, which can lead to tooth loss. When caught early, your cat may not need a professional cleaning, but severe cases will require dental scaling and polishing. Gingivitis is simple to diagnose, luckily. You will need to lift your cat's lip and get a clear shot of their teeth. If you notice redness, your cat will need an oral exam.

## ***Gingivostomatitis***

Gingivostomatitis is when nearly all of the gum tissue is bright red and irritated. To determine if there is any supportive bone loss due to this gingival inflammation, radiographs will be performed. Stomatitis mainly affects cats and is a severe inflammation of the gum tissue. This condition is very painful and is caused by a hyper-responsive immune system. Treatment for this usually consists of extracting all of the teeth behind the canines, and in some cases, all of the teeth are extracted. Once the teeth are removed, the cat's mouth is tremendously less painful and is more healthy.

### ***Feline Odontoclastic Resorption Lesions (FORLs)***

Feline Odontoclastic Resorption Lesions (FORLs) are areas of irritation that form on the tooth crown and migrate to the tooth bulb. These lesions appear similar to cavities and can be painful and uncomfortable, especially as it progresses. During an oral exam or dental cleaning, this condition can be diagnosed. Tartar on your cat's teeth may be hiding the lesions. If the condition is severe, teeth may need to be extracted.

### **Keeping Your Cat's Teeth Healthy**

There are plenty of preventative measures you can take to prevent the above dental problems from occurring. Brushing your cat's teeth is very beneficial, but may not be the right option for you. You will want to start out slowly, by introducing your cat to the toothbrush before going after her mouth with it. Your kitty may not like it at first, and you may want to start with a towel or fingerbrush, rubbing it along the surface of your cat's teeth. You can also purchase water additives that are mixed in with their drinking water and deter plaque build up. If your cat is a chewer, there are a variety of chewy treats available including CET Dental Chews and Greenies.

Starting and maintaining an oral health program early will help keep your cat's mouth healthy, which helps their overall health. If dental cleanings are necessary, you will want to schedule it as soon as possible, since it can help prevent further complications. If you start an oral health regimen for your cat later in life, it will still help their health, but keep in mind it will not undo the damage done by lesions or tartar accumulation. A dental cleaning is required to take away these symptoms and disinfect their mouth.

With each passing year, pet dental care becomes a more obvious concern for pet owners. Many companies have made it easier for pet parents to purchase food that helps control tartar build up. There are many brands, and there is sure to be one to fit into your budget. Next time you are purchasing cat food, look for some of these:

- Prescription T/D (available at your vet's office)
- Science Diet Oral Care
- Royal Canin DD
- Purina Veterinary Diets DH
- Friskies Dental Diet
- Greenies treats
- CET Chews

You can find most of these brands at your local pet store or you can special order them through your veterinarian, if needed. For any questions or concerns, please give us a call at 803-781-7483 today.