



Pet Dental Health

Dental hygiene is an important part of your pet's health regimen, but it can be a challenge for some pet owners to make sure their pet's pearly whites stay "pearly white." This can simply be because your dog doesn't chew...or chews the wrong stuff. Cats are another battle altogether. It is easy to be discouraged, but luckily, there are numerous ways to maintain your pet's dental health.

What exactly are "bad teeth"?

As your pet ages, plaque and calculus can build up on their teeth if they are not "brushed" properly. For a dog, "brushing" consists of their normal chewing habits or their owner physically cleaning their teeth with a toothbrush or finger brush. This plaque and calculus harbors bacteria with causes bad breath, gingivitis and can result in serious gum disease. When your pet chews, the plaque is removed which keeps their teeth white and clean. However, if your pet is not much of a chewer, this plaque will collect, harden, and turn into calculus. It's important to occasionally lift up your pet's lips and check out their teeth, because otherwise you may not know their teeth are unhealthy.

Encourage good chewing habits!

One of the easiest ways to delay the progression of periodontal disease is encouraging the right kind of chewing habits. As puppies and kittens, our pets chew a LOT. As pet parents, we discourage our furry friends from chewing telephone cords, our fingers and other objects, but it is important to encourage chewing of the right kind of chew toys. There are a wide range of products available for dog owner to purchase. If your kitten or puppy loves chewing on your favorite sneakers, give them an appropriate chew toy in its place.

A good chew toy is durable and will keep your pet occupied for a good chunk of time. If your pet can destroy or eat it in the blink of an eye, then it's not the right kind of chew toy for them. A toy that keeps them occupied for awhile not only keeps them out of trouble, it helps them really "brush" their teeth and remove plaque and debris. Nylabone brand makes a number of different types of bones and varying flavors. They are designed for chewers and typically take awhile to wear down. Your dog may tear off small pieces, but this is nothing to be concerned about. Rawhides are another option, as long as your pet isn't allergic and they don't bite off big chunks. Next time you want to purchase a chew toy, bring your pet with you! Most pet stores allow you to bring your pet inside, which not only aids you in choosing the correct size bone or toy, it lets you have an adventure together! (Just make sure they are up-to-date on their vaccines of course!)

Another factor to consider in finding a chew toy that it is size appropriate. If a toy is too small, your pet may chew off big pieces and swallow them. For toys that are too big, your pet may ignore it because they cannot get their mouth around it.

Below are a few products you could use:

- Nylabones
- Kong
- Greenies Feline and Canine Chew Sticks
- Rawhides

My pet is not a chewer. What do I do?

If your dog or cat isn't a fan of "chewing" don't fret. There are quite a few products you can use to help them maintain good oral health. These include water additives, food, treats, and a good old fashioned toothbrush.

Here are some alternative products to chew toys:

- Science Diet Oral Care
- Royal Canine Dental DD
- Hill's Prescription Diet t/d
- Virbac CET Chews, toothpaste, and oral rinses
- Petstages Dental Health Chews
- Friskies Dental Diet

Periodontal Disease

Like humans, canine periodontal or gum disease is the inflammation of the tissues surrounding a tooth. Once tartar forms on a tooth, bacteria takes over and the tissues become irritated and inflamed. If this is left untreated, the infection and inflammation can become worse, and the tissues begin to recede, tooth and mouth health declines, and the teeth will eventually fall out or create an isolated pocket of infection. This is extremely painful and creates heightened sensitivity around your dog or cat's mouth. It will cause them to salivate frequently, and can lead to loss of appetite. This bacteria can also enter their bloodstream, which can seriously affect major organs and other areas of the body.

Even if you think your pet just has bad breath, you should still have them checked out by a veterinarian. Bad breath can be an early sign and stage of periodontal disease, and luckily, this can be easily treated. This is why pet dental care is so important!

Veterinarians often describe periodontal disease in a few stages:

Stage One – Gingivitis

This is the inflammation of the gum tissue, and is the first sign of a dental disease. As plaque forms on the teeth and builds up, it leads to irritation to the gum tissue. Healthy gums are usually a pale to light pink color. When a patient has gingivitis, their gum tissue become inflamed and is bright red. You may also notice an odor in your pet's mouth at this point.

In its early stages, gingivitis does not cause tooth loss and your pet's blood work may show an increase in neutrophils, a type of white blood cell. Late gingivitis affects more gum tissues and can result in buccal ulcers. Buccal ulcers are ulcers that form on the lips as a result of chronic inflammation.

Stage Two – Early Periodontal Disease

This stage involves noted attachment loss of tissues and bone loss with early periodontal disease. When you lift your pet's lip, you may see a build-up of calculus or puffy gum tissue. If this is the case, your veterinarian will most likely recommend a dental cleaning and clean up your pet's teeth to avoid any tooth loss. A dental cleaning consists of first ultrasonic scaling of the teeth, then polishing the teeth with pumice paste. After that, a fluoride foam is applied, which helps strengthen the enamel.

Stage Three – Moderate Periodontal Disease

Stage Three involves more bone loss, tooth root damage, loose teeth and more attachment loss. The teeth will have a slight to moderate recession of gum tissue and a thick build up of calculus. Your pet's mouth will be odorous and very sensitive. You should schedule a dental cleaning immediately, as there is a lot of bacteria hiding within their mouth, and they may need a round of antibiotics before the cleaning. Unfortunately, some teeth may need to be extracted because of the severity of the dental disease. Once your pet's teeth are clean and the unhealthy teeth are removed, your pet's oral health will improve. Some veterinarians may put a patient on a "pulse therapy" of antibiotics to help keep the bacteria from building up after the dental cleaning.

Stage Four- Severe Periodontal Disease

This stage is very severe. Your pet will have noted tooth abscesses, sheets of calculus, gingival recession, and severe attachment loss. Their teeth will be very loose and some may have already fallen out. A dental cleaning is needed, and tooth extraction may be necessary for some teeth. An oral antibiotic will be administered prior to the cleaning and will continue for a few days afterward.

Dental prophylaxis is a professional cleaning performed by your veterinarian. This is considered to be a surgical

procedure, as your pet will be put under anesthesia. Your pet will have an intravenous catheter placed to keep them hydrated and stabilize their blood pressure. Once the IVC is in place, a sedative is administered, which allows the vet or vet tech to place an endotracheal tube and maintain the patient on isoflurane gas anesthesia. Then, a hand scaler is used to chip off large pieces of calculus and a fine cleaning is done with an ultrasonic cleaner. This allows your veterinarian to clean under the gum line, where a lot of bacteria and tartar hides. This also flushes out bacteria, which is why your pet receives an antibiotic before the procedure. After the teeth have been cleaned, your vet will use a pumice paste to polish the teeth. This also creates a smooth surface on the teeth, which makes it harder for bacteria to collect on. Scaling and polishing helps remove minor stains on your dog's teeth, but severe periodontal disease affected teeth may still look "dirty" because of the staining. After the teeth are polished, a fluoride gel is applied to help strengthen the enamel.

Home Care

Creating an at-home dental care regimen for your pet is all about finding something that works for you and your furry friend. Typically, you will want to brush your pet's teeth at least weekly to keep their mouth healthy. You can use an enzymatic toothpaste, like Virbac's CET toothpaste, in addition to brushing. This toothpaste contains enzymes that fight bacteria within your pet's mouth. If you are unable to brush your pet's teeth, provide them with good chew bones or toys. This helps keep their mouth healthy, and keeps them busy for a good amount of time. Kongs, Nylabones, dental sticks, or even rawhides are all good options if your pet likes chew toys or chewing.

Whether it is encouraging good chewing habits or through weekly brushing, maintaining a good home oral care program with your pet is essential to keeping them happy and healthy. It also reduces the frequency of professional cleanings they will need, and keeps oral bacteria populations down.

Concerned about your pet's teeth? Call us today!

If you would like a doctor to evaluate your pet's dental status or are concerned with their teeth, please feel free to schedule an appointment with us today! You may reach us at 803-781-7483. Remember, the first signs of an unhealthy mouth can be bad breath so remember to "Lift the Lip"!