

Dental care for dogs and cats 101

We all know how important it is to brush our own teeth and keep our mouths clean, but how often do we think about the mouths of our pets? Cats and dogs have mouths very similar to our own and actually suffer from the same dental conditions that people do; in fact gum disease is the most common disease diagnosed in cats and dogs. It's so common that by the time 50% of cats and 80% of dogs have reached three years of age they have some level of periodontal (gum) disease. However unlike people, cats and dogs aren't able to brush and care for their own teeth, they need our help to keep their mouths clean and healthy.



Healthy mouth



Severe periodontal disease

Ok, so that's really gross but can't I just not look? Not exactly... eventually the bacteria that build up on the teeth may cause your pet to have bad breath, bleeding, pain, trouble eating, and some teeth may even fall out. Even more worrisome than a lost tooth is the

damage the bacteria can do in the rest of your pet's body. Studies have shown that bacteria in the mouth can get into the blood stream and migrate to the kidneys, heart, or liver and cause severe damage there that may eventually lead to death.

The best way to keep your pet's mouth healthy is prevention of dental disease and plaque buildup before it starts. Daily brushing is the most reliable way to keep bacteria from establishing a stronghold in your pet's mouth, chewing on abrasive surfaces and certain diets can also help reduce bacteria load. For more information on how to get your pet used to you brushing their teeth check out this link

<http://veterinarymedicine.dvm360.com/vetmed/data/articlestandard//vetmed/182007/424680/article.pdf>

My pet won't tolerate me brushing its teeth, is there anything else I can do to help keep his teeth and mouth healthy? If given enough time almost all pets eventually accept brushing, but forcing an animal to do something always carries a risk. There are lots of products on the market and in stores that claim to keep teeth clean and healthy, however not all of them are created equal, as a general rule if it sounds too good to be true it probably is. CET Dental Chews (<http://www.virbacvet.com/products/detail/c.e.t.-enzymatic-oral-hygiene-chews-for-dogs/dental-health/chews>) and Hill Prescription Food T/D (teeth diet) are two products that have proven results; when brushing isn't an option these are the next best thing.

My dog has lots of toys that he chews on and plays with all the time, does that mean I don't have to worry about his teeth? The answer here really is, it depends. Some toys do help remove plaque from teeth while others do not and can actually damage the teeth. Lots of dogs LOVE tennis balls but the abrasive outer surface often wears down the canine teeth and can lead to painful pulp exposure. If you have a ball loving dog, a smooth surface ball might be a better choice for their teeth. Hard nylon products can also be dangerous. These products are often so hard that aggressive chewing can lead to broken painful teeth and damaged gums, especially in puppies and small dogs.

My pet already has severe dental disease; can I fix it with daily brushing and a dental diet? Unfortunately no, once your pet has a significant amount of plaque built up on their teeth a professional dental cleaning by a veterinarian is required to restore oral health. To allow veterinarians to perform a full oral examination the use of anesthesia is needed in all pets. A dental includes a thorough history and visual exam, often with radiographs, and all abnormalities being charted. An ultrasonic scaler is then used to remove the plaque from all surfaces of the teeth and any teeth that are too unhealthy to be saved are carefully extracted (pulled). After scaling is complete, all the teeth are polished to remove any left-over plaque and to prevent future build up by smoothing out the tooth surface.

There you have it, the basics of dog and cat dental care. Brushing is best, start early and brush often. When brushing isn't an option certain chews and foods can help reduce bacterial load. For specific recommendations for your pet and to find out what stage gum disease they may have call our office to schedule an appointment today!