

Dental & Periodontal Disease



Why do pets need dental/periodontal cleanings and home dental care?

Periodontal disease is the number one health problem in dogs and cats. It affects about 75% of small animal patients by the age of 2. If left untreated, periodontal disease can result in:

- oral pain/odor
- tooth abscesses
- bone infections
- liver disease
- kidney disease
- cardiac disease
- increased incidence of diabetes.

Periodontal disease is best treated and managed early when inflammation is mild & limited to the gums. If disease is allowed to progress, the damage becomes irreversible.

Small breed dogs tend to be more genetically susceptible to dental/periodontal disease. They typically need more frequent home dental care and professional cleanings.

Why do we perform all dental cleanings under general anesthesia?

General anesthesia is the only way to ensure a safe & thorough oral evaluation and dental cleaning. Anesthesia-free veterinary dentistry usually involves multiple people immobilizing a pet while the teeth are handscaled or brushed. Without anesthesia, the dental caregiver is unable to probe for periodontal pockets, evaluate for oral tumors/discolored teeth/tooth fractures, clean inner tooth surfaces or behind back molars, clean below the gumline or polish the teeth after scaling. While supragingival (above the gumline) cleaning results in a more cosmetic appearance of the teeth, the plaque that sits *below the gumline* is what causes periodontal disease. Moreover, scaling the teeth results in tiny scratches in the enamel which should be smoothed out by polishing. Without polishing, bacteria are able to attach to the tooth more readily resulting in faster plaque buildup.

Why & how do you brush your pet's teeth?

Plaque begins to build up within 2 weeks of a dental cleaning. To prevent this, we recommend *daily* toothbrushing. Use a soft bristled toothbrush appropriate to the size of your pet's mouth and pet toothpaste (not human toothpaste). Ideally, use a circular motion with the brush at a 45 degree angle to the gumline. Let us know if you would like a technician to provide a demonstration. If your pet has never had his teeth brushed, ease into it slowly. You may only be able to brush a quarter of the mouth at a time in the beginning, but be consistent in your efforts. If you are unable brush your pet's teeth every day, brush at least three times a week.

Dental Care Products

If you are unable to brush your pet's teeth with the recommended frequency, there are some many passive dental care products available. The following products have been found to be effective:

- Chlorhexidine oral rinses (i.e. CET Oral hygiene rinse, Nolvadent)—use daily.
- Rawhides or CET Chews/Hextra Chews—only for dogs who do not have rawhide intolerance/allergy or the tendency to swallow large chunks of whole rawhide. Give rawhides 10-15 minutes several times a week under supervision. Realize that rawhides only benefit the chewing teeth. Incisors & canine teeth will still need to be brushed.
- Maxi/Guard Oral Cleansing Gel—this is a tasteless gel so it is especially good for cats.
- Hills t/d—prescription kibble that cleans teeth at the gumline. Can be used as frequent treats or a primary diet.

Want more info? Check out www.VOHC.org.