

Companion Animal Dental Care is Important

Pets have teeth too, and dental care leads to improved general health. Pet owners can get the dental care their pets need in working with veterinarians.

When did you last look in your pet's mouth?

Have you ever experienced a painful tooth or an uncomfortable sore in the mouth? Most people that have broken teeth seek dental care because of pain. Pet owners would also seek dental care for their companions if they were aware of problems.

The fact is, if you don't look in your pet's mouth, you are very likely missing important problems. Why did you last look into your pet's mouth? If "bad breath" is the reason, dental care is needed now. Pet owners need to be more aware of oral health, and by routinely brushing teeth, looking into the mouth becomes a habit leading to improved overall health. It is common sense if you think about it. A regular tooth brushing is a great habit that leads to early recognition of problems, treatment and improved oral health.

Oral health impacts general health!

Pets with poor oral health often have other health problems. Oral disease can result in general health problems. Dental professionals have long suspected: Infections in the mouth can lead to problems elsewhere in the body. For a long time it was thought that bacteria was the primary factor that linked periodontal disease to other infections in the body. Heart, liver, kidney and other diseases have been associated with bacteria from periodontal disease. More recent research demonstrates that inflammation is significant and may link periodontal disease to other chronic conditions. Experts agree that there is an association between periodontal diseases and other chronic inflammatory conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease. Therefore, treating inflammation as well as bacteria may not only help manage periodontal diseases, but may also help with the management of other chronic inflammatory conditions.

Chronic inflammation and pain is a shame, and as animal advocates, we never want to be to blame. With excellent dental care, we hope to prevent, control and to treat periodontal disease.

Bad breath may be due to Periodontal Disease

Doggie breath or cat tuna breath are indications for immediate dental care. Your veterinarian can help with an oral exam, teeth cleaning, and diagnostic tests. Dental X-rays and periodontal probing are needed to diagnose the problem. Treatments are then based directly on the diagnosis.

Periodontal disease is the most common disease in pets.

In the 1970's studies from the University Of Minnesota College Of Veterinary Medicine demonstrated periodontal disease as the most common of all problems in companion animals. Since it is so common, we should be addressing it rigorously! Have veterinarians and pet owners

made a significant difference in reducing periodontal disease in companion animals? Not really, so as pet advocates we will make a difference in providing better dental care.

Doggie breath or cat tuna breaths may be due to periodontal disease! By three years of age, 70% of cats and 80% of dogs have some form of this disease. Periodontal disease can cause severe pain and swelling, but it also may not even be noticed at all. So this disease is not always the same.

Why should you care about periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection caused by plaque bacteria. If unrecognized and untreated, it can be devastating for companion animals. Typically severe disease results in bad oral odor or tooth loss. The development of this local infection and the spread through the blood stream are preventable. Pain, inflammation, chronically sneezing (oronasal fistulas), jaw fractures, eye problems, and oral cancer can all be recognized early and effectively treated. Do you see it or smell bad breath? If you do, please get a thorough dental evaluation that includes dental X-rays, diagnosis and treatment options!

Remember heart, kidney, liver and chronic inflammatory diseases have been associated with periodontal disease. Periodontal disease can cause serious problems with insulin control in diabetic pets and humans. Furthermore the severity of periodontal disease in humans has been shown to be a potential “predictor” of death. The evidence is compelling that we must care about oral health for our companion animals.

How do plaque bacteria cause severe destruction and “bad breath”?

Plaque bacteria are the sticky substances on the tooth surface. It is particularly interesting that these bacteria are unusually resistant to antibiotic medications or the pet’s natural ability to fight off disease (immune defense). Another problem with the pet’s immune defense is that self destruction can occur. The result is pain, swelling and “bad breath”.

Periodontal disease is described in two stages, gingivitis and periodontitis. Gingivitis is the initial, **reversible** stage in which the inflammation is confined to the gingiva (“gums”). The gingival inflammation is created by plaque bacteria as well as the local immune defense mechanisms. This inflammation may be reversed with a thorough teeth cleaning and daily teeth brushing.

Periodontitis is a more severe stage in the progression of periodontal disease. Periodontitis can be thought of as a severe infection of the bone and other tissues that support the teeth. The more severe periodontitis gets, the more likely the teeth will smell bad and eventually fall out. Periodontal bone loss is **irreversible** (without special regenerative surgery). Although bone loss is irreversible, it is possible to stop the disease progression

What can be done to prevent and control Periodontal Disease?

Calculus (or tartar) is basically plaque which has become calcified by the minerals (calcium and magnesium) in saliva. Teeth cleaning will effectively remove the calculus and plaque bacteria that cause periodontal disease. Daily teeth brushing helps keep the teeth free of plaque and prevents periodontal disease. A routine tooth brushing is an extremely important habit. Three days after your veterinarian cleans your pet's teeth, plaque accumulates and turns into calculus. Brushing teeth only removes plaque but not calculus and some of the bacteria under the calculus cause further damage (periodontitis). Now there is doggie breath or kittie tuna breath.

What can pet owners do?

If you see calculus, it's time to have the teeth cleaned. If you smell "bad breath", you can be reasonably certain your companion has periodontal disease. Cleaning teeth is not enough to treat gum disease. Dental X-rays and periodontal probing is needed to diagnose and to treat this disease. After the teeth are cleaned and the problems are appropriately treated, you must brush all of the teeth at least every other day and preferably every day.

How can you brush your companion's teeth?

A video explains how to select a tooth brush and how to be effective at brushing teeth daily (at www.mypetsdentist.com). For pet's sake, check out this site.

Be an advocate for your pet and seek dental care to improve their general health. Bad doggie breath or kittie tuna breath may be due to periodontal disease. Pet owners can get the dental care their pets need in working with veterinarians. Our pets count on us to care, and we certainly do!

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