

Cedar Way Veterinary Clinic
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Dental Care Information for your Dog and Cat

Dental Disease in DOGS

Dental disease is a common and often overlooked problem in dogs. While cavities represent the most common dental disease of humans, dogs are more frequently bothered by tartar buildup on the teeth. Tartar accumulation leads to irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth, ultimately leading to exposure of the roots. Potential outcomes of this tooth root exposure include gum infections (gingivitis and periodontitis) and tooth loss.

Contributing Factors

One of the main factors determining the amount of tartar buildup is the individual chemistry in the mouth. Some dogs need yearly cleanings; other dogs need a cleaning only once every few years.

Diet plays more of a minor role in development of tartar accumulation than most people think. Because dry food is not as sticky as canned food, it does not adhere to the teeth as much and thus, does not cause tartar buildup as rapidly. However, eating dry food does not remove tartar from the teeth. Chew toys, nylabones, Greenies, etc. all help with tartar control when your dog is actually chewing on these, not just a few chews and eating them but nothing will replace brushing your pet's teeth and periodic professional cleaning. Once tartar forms, a professional cleaning is necessary.

Causes/Transmission

Many different disorders can lead to dental disease in the dog. In general, my family doctors at Mill Creek Animal Clinic will try to determine whether the problem is limited to the oral cavity (primary dental disease) or has developed as a consequence of another disease (secondary dental disease).

Clinical Signs

In some cases, you may be unaware that your dog has dental disease. The problem may be identified with a routine physical examination or during investigation of another problem. Have you lifted up your dog's lips recently to actually look at all of your pet's teeth?

In other situations, the probability of dental disease is apparent to the owner. The dog may have very bad breath (halitosis), difficulty eating, drooling, or changes in temperament due to a painful mouth. Be aware that other metabolic problems (kidney disease) and cardiac disease may also be present and being worsened due to the dental disease.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of dental disease is usually very straightforward. A visual examination of the oral cavity reveals tartar and gingivitis. However, in most cases, the true extent of the disease cannot be determined unless your dog is under anesthesia. This facilitates a more complete examination of the oral cavity. Blood will be drawn prior to anesthesia to evaluate blood cell counts (CBC) and chemistries on all dogs going under anesthesia.

Treatment

Proper cleaning of the teeth requires complete cooperation of the patient so that plaque and tartar can be removed properly. Anesthesia is required to *thoroughly* clean the teeth. Many owners have a high degree of anxiety related to general anesthesia for their dogs. While there is always a degree of risk with any anesthetic, be aware that delaying proper dental care may ultimately compromise the dog's health.

To minimize risk, we use modern anesthetics that are deemed safe even for your older dog.

1. *Scaling* removes the tartar above and below the gum line. This is done with hand instruments and ultrasonic cleaning equipment. The tartar that is under the gums must be removed for a dental cleaning to be complete.

2. *Polishing* smoothes the surface of the teeth, making them resistant to additional plaque formation.
3. Other procedures including subgingival curettage, gingival flaps, and extractions may also need to be done.

Prognosis

In the early stages of dental disease, the problems may be reversible. At some point, however, even cleaning cannot restore the mouth to normal. This is not a reason to avoid cleaning!

The prognosis is worsened if tartar is left on the teeth indefinitely. Some of the consequences of delayed dental care are:

1. The tartar will mechanically push the gums away from the roots of the teeth. This allows the teeth to loosen in their sockets and infection to enter the root socket. The teeth will loosen and fall out or have to be extracted.
2. Infection will accumulate in the mouth, resulting in gingivitis (gums), periodontal disease, tonsillitis, and pharyngitis (sore throat). Although antibiotics may temporarily suppress the infection, if the tartar is not removed from the teeth, infection will return quickly.
3. Infection within the mouth will be picked up by the blood stream and carried to other parts of the body. Kidney and heart infections frequently begin in the mouth.

Prevention

Several preventive measures can be recommended to aid in oral hygiene for your dog..

1. Regular veterinary care is vital and having the teeth cleaned when advised.
2. Try to maintain home dental care by **brushing** your pet's teeth. Special toothbrushes and flavored toothpastes are available. We will be happy to show you how to do this and to recommend a schedule. Weekly application of a barrier sealant – Oravet – is also recommended.
3. A tartar control diet is available through our clinic. It can be used as a maintenance diet or as a treat. It will not clean the teeth but will prolong the interval between professional cleanings (under anesthesia).

For more information on your pet's dental health, check out these websites:

www.petdental.com
www.veterinarypartner.com

Dental Disease in CATS

Dental disease is a common and often overlooked problem in cats. Cats are more frequently affected by cavities, especially at the gum line as well as by tartar buildup on the teeth. Tartar accumulation leads to irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth, ultimately leading to exposure of the roots. Potential outcomes of this tooth root exposure include gum infections and tooth loss.

What factors influence dental disease?

One of the main factors determining the amount of tartar buildup is the individual chemistry in your pet's mouth. Some cats need yearly cleanings; other cats need a cleaning only once every few years.

Once tartar forms, a professional cleaning is necessary.

Other known risk factors for feline dental disease are the feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and the feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Severe disease of the teeth and gums can alert us to test for these diseases. A variety of other oral diseases are seen in cats that can also mimic dental disease.

What does it do to my cat?

In some cases, you may be unaware that your cat has dental disease. The problem may be identified with a routine physical examination or during investigation of another problem. In other situations, the probability of dental disease is apparent to you. Your cat may have very bad breath (halitosis), difficulty eating, or changes in temperament indicating pain or other problems aggravating dental disease.

What are the causes?

Many different disorders can lead to dental disease in your cat. In general, we will try to determine whether the problem is limited to the oral cavity (primary dental disease) or has developed as a consequence of another disease (secondary dental disease).

How do we know how much disease is present?

Diagnosis of dental disease is usually very straightforward. In most cases, the true extent of the disease cannot be determined unless your pet's is under anesthesia. This facilitates a more complete examination of the oral cavity. Blood will be drawn prior to anesthesia to evaluate blood cell counts (CBC) and chemistries on all cats going under anesthesia.

How is it treated?

Proper cleaning of the teeth requires complete cooperation of your cat so that plaque and tartar can be removed properly. Anesthesia is required to thoroughly clean the teeth. Many owners have a high degree of anxiety related to general anesthesia for their cats. While there is always a degree of risk with any anesthetic, be aware that delaying proper dental care may ultimately compromise your cat's health.

To minimize risk, we use modern anesthetics, which are deemed safe even for your older cat. Also various tests will be performed prior to anesthesia to detect any health problems that may affect your cat under anesthesia. All cats are required to have a pre-anesthetic blood test performed prior to anesthesia. We may also recommend antibiotics prior to dental cleaning as well as antibiotics and/ or pain medications post dental cleaning.

Can your cat's teeth be saved?

In the early stages of dental disease, the problems may be reversible. At some point, however, even cleaning cannot restore your cat's mouth to normal. This is not a reason to avoid cleaning! The prognosis is worsened if tartar is left on the teeth indefinitely. Some of the consequences of delayed dental care are:

1. The tartar will mechanically push the gums away from the roots of the teeth. This allows the teeth to loosen in their sockets and infection to enter the root socket. The teeth will loosen and fall out or have to be extracted.
2. Infection will accumulate in the mouth, resulting in gingivitis (gums), periodontitis, tonsillitis, and pharyngitis (sore throat). Although antibiotics may temporarily suppress the infection, if the tartar is not removed from the teeth, infection will return quickly.
3. Infection within the mouth will be picked up by the blood stream and carried to other parts of the body. Kidney and heart infections frequently begin in the mouth. Philosophically speaking, the mouth is the entrance to the body!

How can I prevent this from recurring?

- A. Several preventive measures can be recommended from us to aid in the oral hygiene of your cat..
- B. Regular veterinary care and having your cat's teeth cleaned when recommended.
- C. Try to maintain home dental care including brushing your cat's teeth. Special toothbrushes and flavored toothpastes are available. We will be happy to show you how to do this and to recommend a schedule.

For more information on your pet's dental health, check out these websites:

www.petdental.com Hills web

www.veterinarypartner.com

Keep in mind that about 90% of bad breath comes from your pet's teeth. If your dog or cat's breath is bothering you, just imagine how that breath is bothering your dog or cat.

If you have any questions regarding the dental health of your dog or cat,
feel free to contact us at any time.

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