

# Pet Dental Care

Dental health is a very important part of your pet's overall health, and dental problems can cause, or be caused by, other health problems. Your pet's teeth and gums should be checked at least once a year by your veterinarian to check for early signs of a problem and to keep your pet's mouth healthy.

## Oral health in dogs and cats

Your pet's teeth should be checked at least once a year by your veterinarian for early signs of a problem and to keep your pet's mouth healthy. Have your pet's teeth checked sooner if you observe any of the following problems:

- Bad breath
- Broken or loose teeth
- Extra teeth or retained baby teeth
- Teeth that are discolored or covered in tartar
- Abnormal chewing, drooling, or dropping food from the mouth
- Reduced appetite or refusal to eat
- Pain in or around the mouth
- Bleeding from the mouth
- Swelling in the areas surrounding the mouth

Some pets become irritable when they have dental problems, and any changes in your pet's behavior should prompt a visit to your veterinarian. Always be careful when evaluating your pet's mouth, because a painful animal may bite.

## Causes of pet dental problems

Although cavities are less common in pets than in people they can have many of the same dental problems that people can develop:

- Broken teeth
- Periodontal disease
- Abscesses or infected teeth
- Cysts or tumors in the mouth
- Malocclusion, or misalignment of the teeth and bite
- Broke (fractured) jaw
- Palate defects ( such as cleft palate)

Periodontal disease is the most common dental condition in dogs and cats – by the time your pet is 3 years old, he or she will very likely have some early evidence of periodontal disease, which will worsen as your pet grows older if effective preventive measures aren't taken. Early detection and treatment are critical, because advanced periodontal disease can cause severe problems and pain for your pet. Periodontal disease doesn't just affect your pet's mouth. Other health problems found in association with periodontal disease include kidney, liver, and heart muscle changes. The treatment of periodontal disease involves a thorough dental cleaning and x-rays may be needed to determine the severity of the disease. Your veterinarian or a board-certified veterinary dentist make recommendations based on your pet's overall health and the health of your pet's teeth, and provide you with options to consider.

## Why does dentistry require anesthesia?

Anesthesia makes it possible to perform the dental procedures with less stress and pain for your pet. In addition, anesthesia allows for a better cleaning because your pet is not moving around and risking injury from the dental equipment. If radiographs (x-rays) are needed, your pet needs to be very still in order to get good images, and this is unlikely without heavy sedation or anesthesia.

## What can I do at home for my pet's oral health?

Prevention of the most common oral disease in pets consists of frequent removal of the dental plaque and tartar that forms on teeth that are not kept clean. Regularly brushing your pet's teeth is the single most effective thing you can do to keep their teeth healthy between dental cleanings, and may reduce the frequency or even eliminate the need for periodic dental cleaning by your veterinarian. Daily brushing is best, but it's not always possible and brushing several times a week can be effective. Most dogs accept brushing, but cats can be a bit more resistant patience and training is important.

Be sure to talk with your veterinarian about any dental products, treats, or dental-specific diets you're considering for your pet, or ask your veterinarian for their recommendation.