

Pet Dental Health

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Dental disease is the leading health issue in both dogs and cats over the age of two. Why? Because the pet owner has not been educated nor trained how to properly manage their pet's oral hygiene.

If you never brushed your own teeth, how would your health be? Or how would you like to communicate with everyone else who also did not manage their own oral hygiene? Many pets have lost a significant number of their adult teeth by the age of 8-10, developed kidney, heart and liver diseases because of the low grade systemic bacterial infections in the blood stream. Dental disease also challenges the immune system of pets to the point that their resistance is lowered and they are prone to more health issues.

The anatomy of the gums and teeth is such that there is a small natural trough created at the attachment of the gingival tissue and the tooth called the gingival sulcus. This trough is normally no more than 1mm in depth. This is the most critical area when cleaning the plaque from the tooth surface. It is trough that many bacteria grow.

Volatile sulfur compounds (VSCs) are created from bacteria growing in the mouth and also from the decay of gingival cells. These cells are normally replaced every few hours in a healthy pet. They start to create an increased permeability of the periodontal ligament (This is the disuse that helps hold the tooth in its bony socket), thereby allowing the bacteria to escape into the blood stream of the pet. It is the VSC compounds that also create the halitosis in pets.

Plaque, which initially starts from glycoproteins found in the saliva, adheres to the enamel of the tooth, attracting bacteria, food particles and other cellular debris. If the plaque is not removed within 48-72 hours, it is mineralized from calcium, and phosphorus in the saliva and minerals in the drinking water to become dental calculus or tartar.

Once the calculus is formed, more plaque is started on the top of this calculus, and the process is repeated over and over, building heavy tartar.

Dental calculus cannot be brushed off the tooth but will need to be scraped off. Brushing will remove the plaque. We also believe that if you constantly remove the plaque, the acidic conditions inside the mouth will cause the tartar to soften.

Pet owners are not educated about plaque, halitosis, dental calculus or how to train their pet to let them brush its teeth. Pet trainers can step forward and take on an active role in educating the pet owner in the proper training procedure for tooth brushing. This can be incorporated in your early puppy training and obedience work as you train the pet to accept the handling of the head, mouth, and the opening and exploring of the teeth inside the mouth.

Brushing Dog or Cat Teeth

We know that brushing a pet's teeth is not a simple task. You need to incorporate this into a routine training done daily, and do it the same time each day, to condition the animal to think, "Oh, it's time for my master to brush my teeth."

Start out initially just getting the pet used to you, by handling its head, and mouth, lifting the lip and observing the teeth and gums on both sides of the pet's face. Next, touch the gum tissue with your finger so that they get used to this sensation. Rub your finger along the gums and on the teeth. Wrap your finger with gauze or a soft wash cloth and then touch the gum tissue again. Rub the teeth and gums with your finger covered with the gauze or wash cloth. Finally, introduce a toothbrush by just touching and brushing a small local area. Finally, you will be able to brush on one side and then the other. Don't forget to do the inside surface of the tooth.

There is a toothbrush with three heads that will allow you to brush all three surfaces of the tooth at one time. Train your pet with a little brushing done each day. It will take most pet owners from 8-16 weeks until the pet accepts it readily. Now the pet realizes it doesn't hurt and that it will get 1-2 minutes of your undivided attention. Your pet enjoys your attention, and will eventually wait patiently for you to brush their teeth.

There are many items on the market that can also support the pet owner at home with dental care.

We know that dry kibble will do a better job of helping to keep teeth cleaner than wet food. It has more of an abrasive action when chewed. Now we have special dental diets that will not fracture when the tooth hits the kibble, but act like a sponge.

When the tooth penetrates the kibble, it produces a mechanical scraping action. Biscuits also have an abrasive action to help clean teeth.

There are many helpful dental toys on the market that will also create abrasive action on the tooth surface to help clean teeth. There are some that even act like a flossing agent.

Toothbrushes, toothpastes and gels are available for dental care. You need to be using a very soft toothbrush when brushing your pet's teeth. The gum tissue is very rapidly growing tissue, so you want to brush that is soft, so you don't cause damage to the gums. You need a toothbrush that is easy to handle, and that allows you to reach all the teeth in the animal's mouth.

It is recommended that you do not use most adult toothpastes on your pet.

Many contain agents that can be harmful to your pet and induce vomiting. If you are using a pet toothpaste, make sure it doesn't contain sugars or flavoring agents. If it contains sugars, it will just cause bacteria to grow faster. If it is flavored, then the pet is chewing on the toothbrush as you are trying to brush, and you are not doing an effective job brushing. If you are using a toothpaste, look for one that has enzymes in it to help remove the plaque.

Remember, it is estimated that if a pet owner were to manage his pet's oral health, then the pet would probably live 2-7 years longer and be a happier, healthier pet.