

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR PET FOLLOWING A DENTAL CLEANING



During the dental procedure today, each tooth was cleaned with an ultrasonic dental scaler, polished, and treated with fluoride. Your pet now enjoys the comfort that we do when we go to the dentist. The alarming fact is that tartar or plaque will begin reforming in just a few days. We would like to relay a few ways that you can delay that process and give your pet a healthier mouth, with the added benefit of reduced mouth odor.

The enemy we are fighting is BACTERIA!! Within 12-24 hours of brushing, a soft film of bacteria, called plaque, forms on the tooth surface. If not removed, minerals in the saliva are converted by the bacteria into hard deposits on the teeth, called tartar or calculus. These hard deposits are still 80% bacteria and only 20% mineral.

Tartar deposits put pressure on the gums, resulting in gradual receding of gum tissue, which exposes the tooth root. Bacteria invade into the gum tissue itself, causing redness and swelling. Once in the gum tissue, infection is picked up by the bloodstream and spreads to the rest of the body.

Both tartar build-up and gum recession introduce infection beneath the gums. A foul, infected odor may become noticeable as infection worsens. This progresses further to bone infection and eventually loss of teeth.

Your pet may not complain, but periodontal disease is no fun for your pet. Infected gums and teeth hurt. Diseases such as arthritis, kidney failure, micro-abscesses of the liver and heart valve infection result from poor dental care, reducing life expectancy. Dental care is one of the most important things you can do to care for your pet.

Many of us are conscientious when it comes to our own family's teeth. We brush, floss and see our dentist regularly. That's good, sound preventive care. Your pet will also feel much better with good dental care and will be less prone to a number of diseases. An oral examination is included each year with annual vaccinations, so your dog or cat can retain a bright smile. We will also send you a reminder card when your pet is due for his or her next cleaning.

Some pets (especially small breed dogs) form tartar much more quickly than others. We are actually born with different factors in our saliva that make us more or less prone to tartar, and the same is true for dogs and cats. The hardness of the enamel on the teeth also varies between pets. Diet can make a big difference, too. Good dental care is much more critical for small pets and those who build up tartar more quickly.

The professional cleaning that your pet received today will last much longer if at-home dental care is instituted. We recommend brushing the teeth at least twice a week if you can, using a paste approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council. Daily brushing is best; if you don't brush at least twice weekly the benefit will be minimal. We like the brand CET for both dental chews and tooth paste. Most pets like the malt, mint, or poultry flavors. CET is non-foaming, antibacterial, oxygenating and contains enzymes to reduce formation of new tartar. Your pet is more likely to allow you to brush with a product of this nature, especially with the soft bristle brush or finger brush designed for pets.

The outer surfaces of the teeth should be brushed at the gum line starting five days after the dentistry. If extractions were performed, wait until the doctor tells you your pet's gums have healed enough to be comfortable when brushed. Start by doing just one tooth, or by gently rubbing some toothpaste onto the teeth, accompanied by lavish praise or treats. Increase the number of teeth brushed each time, and before long your pet will probably permit all of the teeth to be brushed. Remember, concentrate on the outer surfaces; the tongue brushes the

inner surfaces.

The more dental care you are willing or able to provide your pet at home the healthier his or her mouth will be and the less likely tartar build-up will progress to gingivitis and bone loss. However, you will never be able to completely stop the formation of tartar, any more than regular tooth brushing prevents your own teeth from needing to be cleaned. Home care helps a lot but it's not a miracle cure. We can't expect you to brush your pet's teeth after every meal or snack, not all the teeth are easily reachable with a toothbrush and not every pet will allow their teeth to be brushed. You do the best you can but we cannot guarantee that your pet will never need extractions or gum treatments.

If your pet won't permit brushing, consider tartar prevention diets and treats, the water additive Healthy Mouth™ and more frequent cleanings here at the hospital.

WHAT IF MY PET HAS PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

If your pet has early periodontal disease or needed extractions today, he or she is at high risk for losing more teeth in the future. You will need to be extra vigilant and work extra hard to prevent as much plaque and tartar as you can. Here's how:

Look for the VOHC seal on any dental home care product you purchase. If approved by the veterinary Oral Health Council, you know the product has been tested in clinical trials and we know it works.

- 1) Don't wait too long between cleanings. The teeth should be cleaned when mild to moderate tartar is present.
- 2) If a thin, red line appears along the gum line, periodontal disease is present and a dental cleaning is likely needed. Bad breath is another sign of dental infection.
- 3) Provide home care but be realistic. It's very common for us to have to extract multiple teeth even when owners are working hard to provide good care. If your pet had extractions today chances are good that more will eventually be needed. In dogs, the smallest teeth are the hardest to brush and the ones most likely to become infected. Dogs don't use their tiny incisor or back molar teeth to chew with, so tartar control food and treats don't do these teeth much good. Infection may continue to progress despite all our efforts.
- 4) Many pet owners worry about whether their pet will be able to chew when missing some teeth. Your pet will function and feel better once infected teeth are gone. When bone loss is severe or the tooth is loose, it is too far gone to save and the pet is much better off without it. Infected teeth are painful and continue to spread infection elsewhere. If we can save a tooth with oral antibiotics or subgingival antibiotic gel we will, but loose or badly infected teeth need to be removed.

Caring People Helping Pets



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