

DENTAL CARE FOR PETS



Caring for your pets' teeth is one of the most important aspects of pet care. **Dental care has done more to extend the lives of dogs and cats than any other advance in animal care except the vaccine.** Left untreated, periodontal disease will eventually kill your pet. Having your pet's teeth cleaned here at the veterinary hospital is literally saving your pet's life! Without healthy teeth, your pet is neither healthy nor comfortable.

Bacteria entering the bloodstream via infected teeth and gums infect other organs, especially the kidneys and heart. Organ failure and premature death are the ultimate outcome. Fortunately, periodontal disease is preventable with professional dental care. Have your pet's teeth cleaned regularly!

Dental Facts to remember:

****Periodontal disease is the most common medical condition in small animal medicine, affecting 80% of pets over age 3.**

****Pets who receive dental care live 2 years longer, on average, than pets that don't.**

****Infected and broken teeth are painful to your pets, just as they would be in a person.**

Periodontal disease:

Periodontal disease starts with the build-up of tartar and/or gingivitis (inflammation of the gums). Both are caused by bacteria – the tartar that builds up on the teeth is 80% live bacteria and the rest is mineral deposits. Bacteria start out in the tartar and then work their way into and under the gums. They invade up along the roots of the teeth, destroying the ligament that attaches the bone to the tooth and the bone itself. Once



We see way too many mouths that look like this, with advanced periodontal disease that should have been addressed long before. We can't save the infected teeth in the red box in the lower picture. The bone has been eaten away too far, leaving the tooth roots exposed. These are major chewing teeth that have to be extracted.

The tooth in the picture below has extensive erosion of the gum and the bone, leaving most of one root completely exposed. This tooth will need to be extracted.



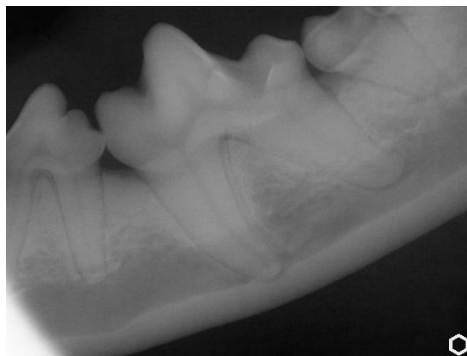
50% or less remains of the bone surrounding a root the tooth is no longer salvageable and must be extracted.

Dental Radiographs

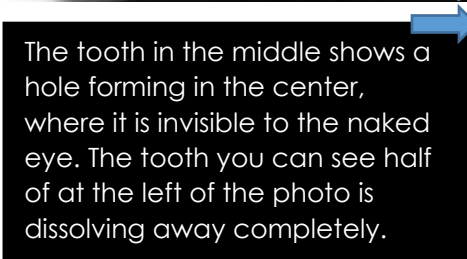
You have x-rays performed when you visit the dentist or oral surgeon, and guess what? Your pet should too! The American Animal Hospital Association's (AAHA) Dental Guidelines strongly recommend that every pet undergoing a dental procedure have full-mouth dental radiographs, (x-rays) performed while under anesthesia.

The ONLY way to accurately evaluate the entire tooth is to take an X-ray. Teeth are a little like icebergs: the part above the gumline we can see, called the crown, is only part of the story. Dogs and cats have long roots (one to three per tooth depending on the type of tooth) below the gumline. It is not uncommon for the crown of a tooth to look normal, yet a dental X-ray reveals a problem hidden below the gums that necessitates treatment, such as extraction or referral to a veterinary dentist.

For years, we have made full mouth dental x-rays optional, but we have made a new year's resolution to include them in every dental procedure in 2024. There are too many hidden problems that we can't see without radiographs. It's not good practice or high-quality medicine to leave them out.



The teeth on the left are normal. The gray lines running through the inside of the teeth are the pulp, where the nerves and blood vessels are.



The tooth in the middle shows a hole forming in the center, where it is invisible to the naked eye. The tooth you can see half of at the left of the photo is dissolving away completely.



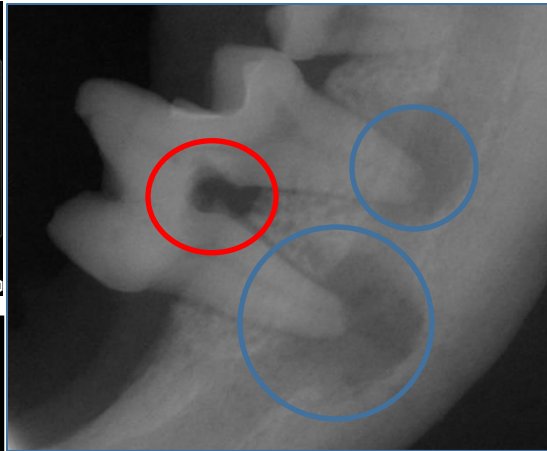
DENTAL X-RAYS

Here is a LIST OF POTENTIAL PROBLEMS a pet may have that dental x-rays help find and diagnose:

1. Periodontal disease (infection of structures around the teeth, including the gums)
2. Abscessed teeth
3. Tooth resorption (see caption)
4. Fractured or discolored teeth- recent studies show as many as 49% of pets have fractured teeth! Discoloration means damaged blood supply to the tooth.
5. Retained root tips after a previous extraction
6. Missing teeth
7. Abnormally located teeth
8. Malformed teeth
9. Osteomyelitis (bone infection)
10. Bone lysis (disintegration) due to cancer
11. Traumatic injury



Above is a radiograph of a cat's lower jaw and teeth. The bone has eroded away due to periodontal disease, leaving 50% of the each tooth root unattached to the bone. When 50% or more of the root-bone connection is lost, the tooth needs to be extracted.



We couldn't tell until we x-rayed this little dog that she had teeth with both resorption (red circle) and abscessed roots (blue circles).

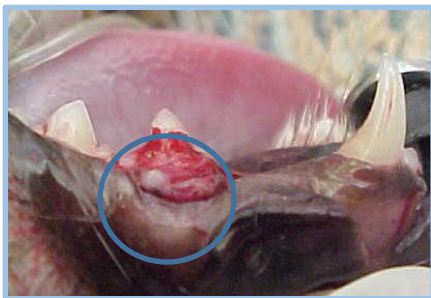
Oral Pain Is Miserable!

We take pain very seriously at Best Friends. If you have ever had oral pain, you know how distressing and debilitating it can be. An abscessed tooth, dry socket or cavity makes your whole face hurt!

Our pets are very stoic even when they are painful, and they can't tell us where it hurts. Dental x-rays safeguard against missing hidden causes of pain in the oral cavity. Overall, dental x-rays ensure your pet goes home happier and with a healthy, comfortable mouth.

Tooth resorption:

More than half of all cats over three years of age have at least one tooth affected by resorption, and we are finding it more and more frequently in dogs as well. A resorptive lesion is like a cavity. In cats, it starts at the gumline, as a small defect in the enamel of the tooth. Over time, it erodes more and more of the tooth, eating into the dentin, which is painful, and eventually the pulp of the tooth, which is even worse. In dogs, these lesions usually start below the gumline, where they are only able to be seen on x-rays of the teeth, as in the red circle in the picture above. As of now, the cause of tooth



The blue circle at left surrounds a tooth that is undergoing resorption and dissolving away. This is very common in cats. These are a type of cavity that forms when the immune system gets carried away attacking plaque bacteria and dissolves the tooth away.



The tooth in the blue circle above has been almost entirely reabsorbed.

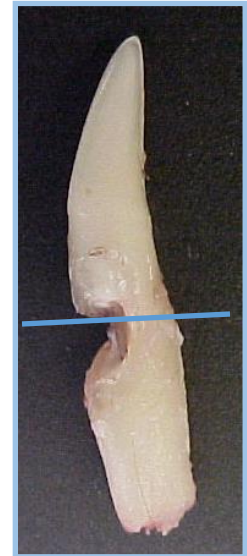
resorption is unknown.

Extracting the damaged tooth is the only treatment. A long time ago, we would put fillings in these teeth, but the cavities just

kept getting larger until the filling fell out. When we find one resorptive lesion, there is a 60% chance we will find more when we take dental radiographs. **It is imperative that these cavities be treated one way or the other, as they are very painful.**

The most important teeth for hunting are the canine teeth. They have very large roots, to enable a high bite force without loosening or breaking the teeth. Most tooth resorption in cats occurs in the small premolars, but they can occur in any tooth. In dogs, they most frequently occur in the large lower molars, which are important chewing teeth.

In this picture, the part of the canine tooth above the blue line is the crown, the part you can see. Below the line is the huge tooth root, with a large hole in it. Many resorptive lesions cannot be seen except with an x-ray



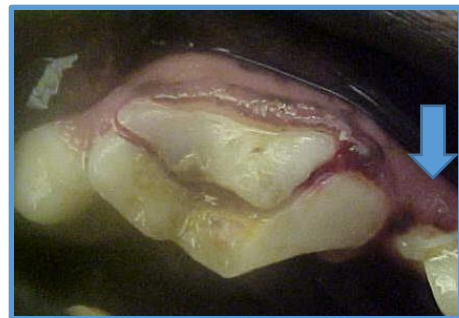
Fractured Teeth, Slab Fractures

The most common fractures of the teeth of our canine patients are called slab fractures. They occur when the dog bites down on a hard object at just the right angle to flake off a piece, or a slab, of tooth. Similar to striking a piece of flint to make an arrowhead, the size of the piece that breaks depends on the force and angle of the blow. The tooth that is almost always affected is the 4th upper premolar, or carnassial tooth - the largest chewing tooth in the upper jaw.

Unfortunately, because this tooth is fairly far back in the mouth it is difficult to see. Many times the pet has a fractured tooth and the family doesn't know it, until an abscess forms. We find many of these fractured teeth when we do our routine annual exams on our patients. Sometimes the same tooth is broken on both the right and left sides of the mouth.

Slab fractures usually occur at the upper 4th premolar tooth, the most important chewing tooth in the upper jaw.


The majority of these fractured teeth occur in large breed dogs. Big dogs, and sometimes little dogs, too, love to chew! They sometimes chew things that are completely inappropriate – rocks, kennel bars, their leash.



Most of the time, however, these fractured teeth occur because the dog's owner gave them something to chew on that was too hard. **Bones, deer antlers, ice cubes, cow hooves and other hard objects should not be given to dogs!** If you can't flex or bend the object, or it hurts if you whack it on your shin, it's too hard! It costs hundreds of dollars to extract broken teeth, as well as causing your dog a lot of unnecessary pain.

Pulp Necrosis

Pulp necrosis, where the blood supply inside the tooth is damaged, is another consequence of gnawing on hard objects. These teeth either need a root canal by a veterinary dentist, or they should be extracted to avoid chronic pain.

This tooth, circled in blue, is discolored – it looks pinkish-gray instead of white. This is because the pulp inside the tooth is dying. This usually results from trauma to the tooth, especially from biting a hard object. 



Giving your dog appropriate things to chew on is good for their teeth and gums, keeps them occupied, and decreases the tendency to chew on things they shouldn't. Unfortunately, our dogs' need to chew on things also leads to lots of broken or damaged teeth.

The Expense of Dental Procedures for Pets

We try hard to keep the cost of a routine dental cleaning reasonable, while at the same time providing a high level of care. Because we need anesthesia to do dental work on pets, you incur all the costs that go along with that; the anesthesia itself, the monitoring and technician time; IV fluids, preanesthetic blood testing and hospitalization.

Dr. Boss decided a very long time ago that her practice would provide high-quality care, not low-cost care. You will usually pay more here with us than you will at other veterinary clinics, but you will also receive a higher standard of care. Your pet will be monitored by a certified veterinary technician; the dental instruments will be sterilized between patients; we will take radiographs of the teeth; we will offer preanesthetic testing to ensure your pet will do well under anesthesia. We don't cut corners with your pet's safety and well-being.

Keep in mind that the more dental home care you provide, the less often your dog or cat will need to come in for professional cleanings. Caring for your pets' dental health at home can be a very good investment, both financially and for comfort.

Never-the-less, your dog or cat will probably need to come in for a dental cleaning and anesthetized oral exam at least once in its life. The average patient of ours needs a dental cleaning annually after the age of 4-5 years. If you have your pet's teeth cleaned as soon as it's needed, it will likely be a less expensive procedure than it will be once periodontal disease is present and teeth need to be extracted. Think ahead and be proactive!

Ways to decrease plaque and tartar build-up in cats and dogs:

- 1) Tooth brushing – if your pet will let you brush the teeth, that's awesome! You must brush at least twice a week to make a measurable difference in plaque & tartar build-up.
- 2) Feed a tartar-control diet. You can reduce plaque and tartar by 30-50%, depending on the food & the species of your pet.
- 3) Use a water additive such as HealthyMouth™ or DenTabs™.
- 4) Dental treats and chews can also decrease plaque build-up.

At the same time we are recommending early and proactive dental care, we also realize that good care can get expensive, especially when your pet has problem teeth that need to be extracted.

Sometimes we take dental x-rays and realize we need to extract multiple teeth – occasionally all the teeth. This can take hours of effort, 20 different instruments, multiple packs of suture, and long anesthetic times. We have a team of 3-4 people, including the DVM, working on your pet. Pain medication will be needed, and sometimes antibiotics as well. It's going to be expensive!

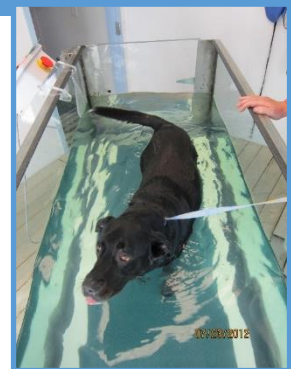
Consider pet insurance while your pet is young and healthy, so dental work above and beyond basic cleaning and polishing of the teeth will be covered by your insurance.



VETERINARY REHAB

Just a reminder that we offer canine rehabilitation. Any dog who has suffered from orthopedic surgery, back surgery or injury to a joint could benefit from veterinary rehab, which is similar to human chiropractic and physical therapy. We would be grateful for any referrals you might make. Now that we have a fourth veterinarian, we have more availability for specialized care.

This is one of our rehab patients on the underwater treadmill



CARE FOR EXOTIC SPECIES, RABBITS & CAGE PETS

We are one of very few clinics in the Milwaukee area that sees these pets!

AFFORDABLE DENTAL CARE

We offer several ways to make it easier for you to afford dentistry for your pets.

- Dental Health Care Plans, which include anesthesia, cleaning and polishing the teeth, IV fluids, full mouth radiographs and pre-anesthetic heart screening, allow you to split the cost into 12 monthly payments.
 - We can divide the cost into 3-4 chunks and run your credit card monthly
 - You can apply for CareCredit™, the credit card that lets you split your cost over 6 months without interest fees.
- www.carecredit.com

Caring People Helping Pets

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