

Dental Month

February is dental month!

Kirkton Veterinary Clinic

www.kirktonvetclinic.com

519-229-8911 / Toll Free 1-888-443-4184

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Dental Disease - the facts

Approximately 80% of dogs and 70% of cats over 4 years of age have dental disease.



Signs of dental disease

1. Bad breath - "doggie breath" is not normal!
2. Loose or missing teeth
3. Dropping food
4. Drooling more than normal
5. Bleeding from the mouth
6. Reduced appetite
7. Weight loss
8. Fearful of the mouth or head being touched

How dental disease develops

Bacteria in the mouth adheres to the teeth forming plaque

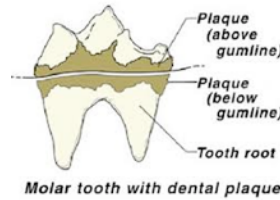
Mineralization of plaque becomes tartar

Dental disease occurs above the gum line (supra-gingival) and below the gum line (sub-gingival).

Treatment of sub-gingival disease is vital to oral health care!

Treatment

A dental prophy is required for proper treatment of dental disease. See below for detailed description of what this entails.



Prevention

- Dental diet
- Teeth brushing
- Dental treats
- Enzymatic gels
- Water-additives
- Talk with your vet to determine which method of prevention is best for you and your dog.

Risks of severe dental disease

Bacterial shedding into the blood stream can result in damage to the liver, kidneys and heart.

Pain - dental disease can be very painful and significantly affect a pet's well-being and general attitude.

Prevention is best! Here's how:

Brushing teeth

Start early! Although puppy teeth don't require much in regards to dental maintenance, getting your puppy used to having their teeth brushed will make it easier to do when they are adults.

Is your pet older? Don't worry they can be trained to enjoy getting their teeth brushed. Start slowly and only perform short sessions. Use treats and yummy smelling doggy toothpaste to reward them. Start by just handling the lips and jaw. Progress to moving the tooth brush over the easy to reach front teeth and slowly start moving farther and farther back into the mouth. Be gentle!

Toothpaste - It is important to use toothpaste formulated for pets. Human toothpastes and home remedy toothpastes can upset your dog's stomach or even be toxic.

Brush regularly - it is important to brush the teeth daily! Use small circular motion over the teeth and focus on brushing at the gum line. Be sure to reach all the teeth at the back and the small incisors at the front.



Alternatives to brushing

Dental Diets - Veterinary dental foods are an excellent option for those who are unable to brush the teeth daily or as additional protection in those dogs with predispositions to dental disease. The foods are good quality and well balanced with special features for dental health. These foods are not appropriate for dogs with special dietary needs such as severe food allergies.

Dental Treats - there are numerous dental treats on the market with some being more effective than others. Check out the Veterinary Oral Health Council for a list of approved dental products: vohc.org/accepted_products.htm

For overweight pets, be sure to account for extra calories when using dental treats and opt for low calorie options when possible.

Enzymatic Gels and Water Additives - These can be helpful therapies for dogs or cats that are resistant to having their teeth brushed.

Talk to your veterinarian to determine which products are right for you and your pet.

What's involved in a dental prophylaxis?

Your veterinarian has recommended your pet have a dental prophylaxis performed to treat dental disease. What does this mean and why is it so important?

General Anesthesia (GA)

Proper dental care must be provided under general anesthesia. This allows for assessment of the entire mouth, appropriate cleaning of the sub-gingival space and extractions of diseased teeth. Adequate dental cleaning cannot be performed in an awake animal.

Often, we will recommend performing pre-anesthetic blood work prior to the procedure. This allows for assessment of general health including liver and kidney function. If problems are identified, they can be managed prior to surgery or the surgical protocols can be altered to better suit the animals' needs.

All animals will have an intravenous catheter placed and intravenous fluids will be used during surgery.

The Oral Exam under GA

Once the animal is under anesthesia, the veterinarian can perform a full oral exam that is not possible in the awake animal. In this exam, all teeth are visualized and the sub-gingival spaces probed to assess for pockets. Levels of gingivitis and periodontal disease are recorded. Each tooth is assessed for health and a plan made for all teeth requiring extraction.

Cleaning and Polishing

A combination of hand scaling and ultrasonic cleaning is used to remove plaque and tartar from the supra-gingival and the **sub-gingival** areas of each tooth. It is the sub-gingival cleaning that is vital to dental health and that is not possible to perform in an awake animal.

Once cleaning is completed, all teeth receive a polish to help reduce the rate of recurrence of tartar and plaque.

Extractions

Teeth identified to have severe disease present will require removal. Extractions

can be simple or complex. More complex extractions require delicate surgical skill by the veterinarian to ensure complete and non-traumatic removal.

Recovery and Post-op Care

All animals are provided pain control during and after surgery. Due to concerns about bacterial shedding into the blood stream, post-op care will also involve giving antibiotics.

It is vital to have a plan for maintaining oral health after surgery. The best way to do this is to begin using a dental food after surgery unless your pet has special dietary needs. Other options for oral health care include brushing your pets' teeth daily (using pet friendly toothpaste!), dental treats, dental gels and water additives. Discuss with your veterinarian what would be best to use for your pet.

