

# Taking care of your pets teeth



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More than 85% of dogs and cats have some form of periodontal disease.

**P**roper dental care is just as important to your pet's health and well-being as things like nutrition, exercise and grooming. Unfortunately, dental hygiene is often overlooked as some pet owners think it's normal for cats and dogs to have bad breath. Like you and I however, bad breath can mean dental disease, so this book has been written to help you understand the importance of keeping your pet's teeth clean.

You might be saying, 'Surely a bit of plaque can't harm my pet?' but you couldn't be further away from the truth. Plaque is formed from food particles, bacteria, and debris build up at the gum line and under the gums. It accumulates on the teeth and hardens into yellow or brown tartar (also called calculus). Lift up your pet's lip and you may see some of this plaque forming on their teeth already, especially towards the back.

Plaque can cause many dental problems, from mild discomfort and bad breath to receding gums, periodontal disease, tooth root abscesses, and loss of teeth and that's just the beginning. Nearby blood vessels can carry the bacteria throughout the body where it can damage your pet's liver, heart, and kidneys. Dental hygiene involves keeping your pet's mouth clean in order to prevent these health problems.

It's something you need to do for your pet because they can't do it properly themselves.

Certain dog and cat breeds are more prone to dental disease.

Do you have one of these breeds?

Smaller or toy breeds have more problems with dental disease than larger breeds. One cause is the acidity and mineral composition of their saliva and the fact that their mouths are overcrowded with teeth. Some examples of these dogs include breeds like:

- Poodles
- Chihuahuas
- Maltese Terriers
- Daschunds

Pets with short noses are also prone to dental disease because they have too many teeth for the amount of room available in their small jaws. Examples are:

- Pugs
- Cavalier King Charles Spaniels
- Pekinese

For the same reason (shorter nose), Persian cats have their share of tooth trouble and the Abyssinian breed is also prone to dental disease.

If you have one of the above breeds please pay extra attention to their teeth. One of the staff here at the practice can advise you on the best care for your pet.





## What are some of the signs of dental disease?

Below are a list of the common signs of dental disease. If you notice any of these behaviours or signs, make an appointment immediately for a dental check up. Your pet may be in pain so please don't delay your visit to us.

### The most common signs are:

- Bad breath
- Pawing at the mouth
- Reluctance to chew
- Excessive drooling
- Shaking of the head
- Red swollen gums
- Bleeding gums
- Loose teeth
- Crying in pain when chewing
- Swelling on one side of the face
- Decreased appetite due to the pain of chewing



## The varying stages of periodontal disease and how it affects your pets health.



HEALTHY

### Healthy

Gums are nice and pink, no inflammation and no plaque present on the teeth.



GRADE 1

### Gingivitis

Margin of gum is inflamed and swollen. Plaque covering teeth. Treatment now can reverse condition of the teeth.



GRADE 2

### Early Periodontitis

Entire attached gum is inflamed and swollen. Mouth is painful and odour begins to be noticeable. A scale and polish here at the practice and a good home dental care program can prevent this from becoming irreversible.



GRADE 3

### Moderate Periodontitis

Red, bleeding attached gum is being destroyed by infection and calculus (tartar). The mouth is sore which can affect eating and behaviour. Bad breath is present. This is the beginning of periodontal disease which may be irreversible.



GRADE 4

### Advanced Periodontitis

Chronic bacterial infection is destroying the gum, tooth and bone. Bacteria may be spreading throughout the entire body via the bloodstream and may damage the kidneys, liver and heart. Immediate attention is required!





## Does my pet really need an anaesthetic to have their teeth cleaned?

A typical pet dental scale and polish includes a full physical exam, treatment and removal of diseased teeth, removal of plaque and tartar, and finally polishing the teeth. Dental work also involves the removal of tartar and bacteria from the teeth above and below the gum line. Animals, no matter how well-trained, do not open up their mouth and put up with the noise and discomfort involved with a full scale and polish. Removing teeth from an animal that is awake is not only dangerous for veterinary staff but can also be very painful for the animal. It is in the best interest of your pet that they be anaesthetised and kept as free from pain as possible.

While complications can occur with any anaesthetic, there may be even worse consequences if you do not look after your pet's diseased mouth. Remember that dental disease can be a constant source of pain and contribute to even more serious heart and kidney problems. It is important to weigh the risks of anaesthesia against the risks of allowing the dental disease to continue untreated.

The anaesthetic we use today is very safe. We also have state of the art anaesthetic monitoring equipment and highly trained staff, skilled in monitoring your pet while undergoing an anaesthesia. We can also offer blood tests prior to your pet's procedure which can show us how the different organs of the body are functioning. This is important information for any anaesthetic procedure. **A blood test prior to an anaesthetic regardless of your pet's age, will add that extra safety level.**



## If my pet requires a scale and polish. What happens?



If your pet requires a scale and polish, they will need to be with us at the practice for a full day as a general anaesthetic is required. You will be asked not to feed your pet after around 10pm the night before the procedure as it's important they have an empty stomach the day of the procedure. Water is permitted overnight on most occasions but we will advise you if we would like water to be withheld.

Like with humans, anaesthesia can make your pet nauseous and during anaesthesia, the swallow reflex is less responsive. What this means is that if your pet vomits they are at risk of aspirating (breathing in) some of the vomit. Any foreign substance in the lungs has a high risk of causing infection that can lead to very serious and sometimes fatal conditions. We know it's hard not to feed your pet the morning of the procedure but please remember it is for their safety.

If your pet has a lot of periodontal disease, it is likely we will prescribe antibiotics for a few days prior to the dental procedure. This will reduce infection in the mouth and the spread of bacteria via the bloodstream.



### On arrival

When your pet arrives, we'll give them a physical exam followed by a sedation to ensure they are nice and relaxed during their stay. Sedation also means we don't require as much anaesthetic to be used. A blood test may also be recommended as we can't get a complete picture of health by physical exam alone. The blood test can show us how the different organs of the body are functioning which is important information for any anaesthetic procedure. A blood test prior to an anaesthetic regardless of your pet's age will add that extra safety level for your pet.



### The procedure

An intravenous (IV) catheter will be placed in your pet's front leg. This catheter will be used to give your pet their anaesthetic and or intravenous fluids.



Once asleep, a breathing tube is inserted into their throat so your pet can breathe in the gaseous anaesthetic which will keep them asleep during the procedure. They will also be breathing in oxygen.

Your pet's teeth will be cleaned using an ultrasonic scaler and any loose teeth will be removed. Your pet's teeth will then be polished which helps fill in any tiny cracks in the tooth left by the ultrasonic scaler.

When your pet's teeth are clean, we will turn off the gaseous anaesthetic but keep your pet on oxygen until they are ready to wake up. When they are reasonably awake we will take them off the oxygen and remove their tube. Your pet will then be transferred to their warm bed to wake up.

Your pet will be ready to go home the same afternoon unless we advise otherwise.

### **What do I do when I get my pet home?**

It is important that you keep your pet calm and warm when you get them home and try to avoid a lot of contact with other pets or children until the next day. Remember they have had a general anaesthesia and may still be a little unsteady on their feet. If the weather is cool you may want to bring them in for the night to keep them out of cold draughts.

Unless advised otherwise, feeding your pet a small meal when you get home is accepted however please be careful if your pet has had extractions. If large teeth have been removed your pet may have stitches in their gums which can be tender (soft food is recommended for the next few days). Don't be concerned if your pet is not interested in food, they may be feeling a little nauseous but should be eating again the next day. Your pet may also have a little cough as the tube which was in their throat during the procedure can sometimes cause irritation, this is normal and will pass.

**Of course, if you are concerned about your pet at any time, contact the practice straight away.**

Now that your pet's teeth are nice and healthy again, it's important you keep them this way. Keep reading this book for ways to keep their pearly whites, white!





## How to keep those pearly whites, white!

Daily removal of plaque is the key to an effective dental hygiene plan. Unless plaque is removed daily, it will build up at the gum line, calculus will form and your pet will need another scale and polish!



### There are 3 ways to keep your pets teeth clean;

- Brushing their teeth with a toothbrush and pet toothpaste
- Offering your pet things to chew on, like raw bones or pigs ears
- Feeding a dental diet

## Brushing your pets teeth



If you choose this option, brushing your pets teeth should be done twice a week (more at first as a training process to get them used to it).

To begin, you will need a soft bristled toothbrush like a baby toothbrush and pet toothpaste. **Do not use human toothpaste!** While we spit out the toothpaste, our pets will swallow it which can make them sick (human toothpaste contains ingredients which can

irritate your pets stomach). Pet toothpaste comes in a variety of flavours so your pet will enjoy the taste! It is also gentle on their stomach.

If you choose to brush your pets teeth, be warned it may not be easy at the start. It may take you and your pet a little time to get used to it but persist and it will get easier. If you would prefer, you can put a small amount of toothpaste on your finger and rub it on their teeth and gums before you try with the toothbrush. Make teeth cleaning sessions fun with a reward following ie small liver treat or a game of ball in the backyard for dogs. Your pet will then associate teeth cleaning with reward time!

### How to brush your pets teeth

- Get into a comfortable position where you can have a good hold of your pets muzzle.
- Lift up their lip and begin brushing in circular motions as you would do your own teeth.
- Ensure you gently brush their gums and teeth right up the back.
- Be prepared for lots of licking. The flavour of the toothpaste is delicious!

## **Feeding RAW bones or chews**

The chewing action of your pet when gnawing on a bone will scrape plaque from the teeth, diminish bad breath, and stimulate the gums. This chewing action helps reduce the risk of dental problems but choose the right chew!

A dog or cat can spend a long time chewing on a bone, enjoying every moment but be aware of the dangers. Cooked bones can splinter and get lodged in your pets digestive system resulting in a trip to the practice, so avoid them at any cost! Cooked bones can also cause constipation.

**Raw** bones on the other hand are much safer to feed. They can be broken down by the digestive system and won't splinter like a cooked bone will. The bone you choose for your pet should be big enough so they cannot swallow it whole. Feeding bones twice weekly is enough to give their teeth a bit of a clean. If feeding bones, it's best to combine it with a dry food formulated to keep the teeth clean.

### **Here are some of the most popular bone types suitable for pets;**

#### **Cats and Small Dogs**

Raw chicken wings or Large chunks of beef.

If you have a very small dog or cat you can break the chicken wing into three sections and feed one at a time if they cannot handle the whole wing.

#### **Medium and Large Dogs**

Raw knuckle bones, Lamb shanks, Whole beef leg bones and Briskett bones, Marrow bones (sparingly).

If feeding raw bones, halve your pets normal meal and offer the bone when they have finished. If you feed them a bone on a full stomach they will bury the bone in the backyard and dig it up later when it's rancid which can cause stomach upsets. Marrow bones are popular with pet owners, however be aware that they have a high fat content. Feeding marrow bones regularly can add some excess weight to your pets waistline! Feed these bones in moderation.

Rawhide bones, greenies, pigs ear and pig snouts are also great to keep pets teeth clean but supervise your pet whilst eating them. They have been known to cause intestinal obstruction although this is very rare!





### **Feeding a dental diet**

This has got to be the easiest way to clean your pets teeth! Premium diets like Royal Canin, Hills Science Diet and Eukanuba, all produce diets which are designed to reduce the accumulation of dental plaque and calculus while providing a complete and balanced diet for you pet. In simple terms, this means that your pets teeth will be cleaned as they enjoy their daily meal!

Some dental diets contain ingredients which bind salivary calcium, making it unavailable for the formation of calculus. This means that the special ingredient makes it difficult for tartar to form on the teeth. Others use the texture and shape of the kibble to produce a gentle abrasive effect on the teeth while your pet chews. The gold standard of dental care is feeding a dental diet, plus giving the occasional raw bone or chew or brushing the teeth a couple of times per week.

**Speak to us here at the practice and we'll recommend the best diet for your pet.**



Now you can enjoy a good cuddle with  
your pet without smelly breath!

