

Dental Disease in Dogs and Cats

As they get older, many dogs and cats develop tartar on their teeth. Tartar is a mixture of food, saliva and bacteria. It builds up where the tooth meets the gum and gradually breaks down the connection between them so that the tooth becomes loose and falls out. The empty socket often gets infected and needs treatment.

There are other problems which can develop as a result of tartar. Bacteria grow on the rough surface of the tartar and can spread and infect the gums, causing gum inflammation (gingivitis). This makes the gums sensitive and can make it uncomfortable for your animal to eat, as well as making your animal have foul-smelling breath.

These bacteria can spread to the bloodstream. The animal can develop a high temperature and feel tired and depressed. The bacteria are carried through the bloodstream to other parts of the body such as the stomach and intestines, which can cause vomiting and diarrhoea. So something that began in the mouth can eventually cause disease anywhere in the body.

Animals which are allowed to develop a build up of tartar will eventually lose their teeth, have gum disease, find eating painful and have foul breath. They may also develop diseases elsewhere in the body. A painful mouth is not a life-threatening condition, but it can make your pet's life miserable. These problems are easy to avoid.

Ask your vet to check your pet's teeth regularly. A good time is when you bring your pet to the

surgery for routine yearly vaccination boosters. If the mouth needs attention, the vet will recommend an anaesthetic to clean the good teeth and remove bad ones. This is all most pets need to give them back a comfortable mouth, and keep their teeth for much longer.

The best time to begin dental care at home is when they are young because they will accept it more easily. To brush your pet's teeth properly, it is advisable to buy a toothbrush and toothpaste designed for your animal to use. Human toothpaste is not suitable as it contains too much fluoride for your pets. If your pet is middle-aged it is advisable to have it's teeth assessed at the veterinary practice first as it may need dental work to correct existing problems before its teeth can be cleaned without causing discomfort.

It is important your pet is comfortable with each step before proceeding to the next one

- 1) Handle your pets mouth every day – lift the lips and rub the teeth and gums. Do this for a few seconds at a time at first, followed by rewards and praise
- 2) When your pet will willingly let you handle its mouth, you can start introducing toothpaste. Put a pea-sized amount on you finger and repeat the first step until your pet becomes used to the taste
- 3) When your pet is happy with the toothpaste you can introduce a brush. Begin by touching the lips and front teeth, gradually working your way around. Once comfortable, apply toothpaste and repeat



Once your pet is used to having the brush and toothpaste in and around their mouth, you can make brushing their teeth part of their daily routine. Have your pet in a comfortable position and pull back the lips on one side, and using small circular movements gradually work your way towards the front of the mouth. Repeat on the other side and finish with the small teeth at the front. Tooth brushing is very effective in dogs and cats, and they will lead a happier life with healthy teeth and gums.

We appreciate that not all pets are willing to have their teeth cleaned, so we would recommend commercial products such as denta-stix, which can play a part in preventing build up.

Care and Kindness For Your Pet

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