



Dental Health and Your Pet

Do you suffer from embarrassment when your veterinarian looks in your pet's mouth? Do you nearly faint when your pet licks your face? If so, your pet is probably way overdue for a dental cleaning. February is National Pet Dental Month so now is a good time to find out what you may be missing inside your pet's mouth.

Approximately 85% of animals over the age of three suffer from some degree of dental disease and if left untreated it can affect their heart, lungs, kidneys, and also cause significant pain. If we make the assumption that once pet year is roughly equal to seven human years then it follows that a 5 year old dog that has never had a dental cleaning is like a 35 year old person that has never brushed their teeth or been to the dentist. Can you imagine?

Things to Look For

Many animals will show not outward symptoms, even with severe dental disease, so it is important that you keep a close eye on your pet's teeth. Though it is important to have your veterinarian evaluate your pet at least annually for dental disease, there are some simple things that you can look for at home:

1. Bad breath
2. Loose teeth
3. Significant dental tartar, redness of the gums, or discharge or bleeding from the gums
4. Pain or difficulty eating, eating from one side of the mouth
5. Drooling excessively
6. A tendency for your pet to shy away when you try to look at his/her mouth
7. Decreased appetite or interest in food, especially with kibble

What Can Be Done at Home

There are a number of things that you can do as an owner to help ensure that that special member of the family has a great smile for life:

1. Brush, brush, brush. Brushing your pet's teeth is the best way to help promote dental health. I can **always** tell when an owner has been brushing consistently. It is important to use a veterinarian approved toothpaste since regular human toothpaste cannot be swallowed. Most animals enjoy their toothpaste since it comes in a variety of flavors like chicken, beef, and malt. There are also a number of dental pastes and rinses that can be used in lieu of or in conjunction with brushing. Thirty seconds a day (or even 2-3 times per week) will help keep your veterinarian away! See <http://www.virbacvet.com/cet/> for more information on dental products.
2. Dental diets. There are a number of dental diets available and they definitely help with tartar buildup in most pets. The idea behind most of these diets is that they are a special consistency

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so that when the pet takes a bite, the individual kibbles will scrape along the tooth enamel and help remove plaque.

3. Dental chews and toys. There is a huge selection for dental treats and toys on the market today. Though none of these products are as effective as brushing, they can help to promote dental health. Talk with your veterinarian regarding which products he/she recommends.

Dental Cleanings and Why Anesthesia Doesn't Have to Be Scary

Even with excellent home care, your pet will still need to have dental cleanings throughout his or her life. Just like in humans, your veterinarian will ultrasonically scale the teeth and polish them afterwards. We perform dental cleanings under anesthesia because this allows us to clean above and below the gum line (where most of the dental disease is located) and assess the need for extractions. This allows the animal to sleep through the whole process, meaning less trauma physically and mentally for the patient. The idea is to create a pain free environment for the pet and allow for a thorough cleaning.

Anesthesia is always a concern for pet owners. However, with modern advances in monitoring equipment and anesthetic agents as well as pre-anesthetic diagnostics, anesthesia is an extremely low risk procedure for most pets. Prior to any anesthesia, your veterinarian will perform a thorough physical exam, looking particularly for evidence of heart or lung disease. It is also recommended that all animals undergoing anesthesia have recent blood work to check for evidence of kidney or liver disease.

Throughout the entire procedure, your veterinarian's trained staff will continuously check vital signs like blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, ECG, and oxygen saturation in the blood to ensure a smooth and uncomplicated anesthesia. Additionally, many veterinarians will place intravenous catheters and run fluids throughout the procedure to help support heart and organ function. If you are still concerned, ask your veterinarian for a clinic tour and an explanation of all the things he or she does to keep your loved ones safe.

Anesthesia-free dental cleanings have become an increasingly available option for pet owners. These procedures are controversial among veterinarians because it is impossible to perform as thorough and painless a cleaning as can be achieved with anesthesia. The American Veterinary Dental College actually advises strongly against anesthesia-free cleanings. The AVDC considers these procedures to be inappropriate for a number of reasons including the inability to clean below the gum line, the fact that a licensed veterinarian is often not involved in the procedure, and the fact that these procedures are often very stressful and painful for the pet. The AVDC considers these procedures to be "purely cosmetic." See <http://www.avdc.org> for more information.

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It's What You Don't See That Is Sometimes the Most Important

Dental disease is a commonly overlooked but very important aspect of your pet's health. Though many owner's think of dentistry as a cosmetic issue, it is a actually extremely important to help ensure that your pet is pain free and to prevent adverse affects on the heart, lungs, and kidneys. Talk to your veterinarian today about what you can do to help ensure your pet has a healthy and happy smile for life!

Links:

<http://www.avdc.org>

<http://www.petdental.com>

<http://veterinarypartner.com/>

<http://www.virbacvet.com/cet/>

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