



OKLAHOMA 4-H DENTAL HEALTH 4-PETS



DENTAL HEALTH FOR MY PETS

Just as, dental care is important for us it is also important for our pets. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, more than 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats develop gum disease by the age of three years. In this handout you will learn:

- What periodontal disease is and how it occurs
- The steps you need to take to protect your pets from periodontal disease
- How to brush your pets' teeth
- Other common dental problems in pets

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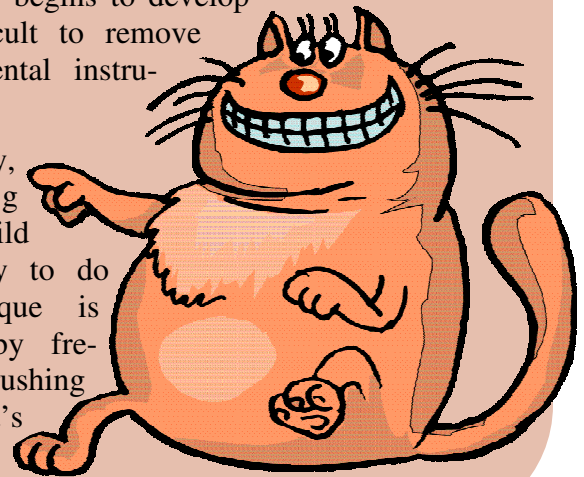
PERIODONTAL DISEASE (GUM DISEASE)

Periodontal disease (gum disease) is the most common disease occurring in pet dogs and cats. Periodontal disease includes infections of the gums and bones that surround and support the teeth.

The cause of periodontal disease is the same for pets as it is for people. It is caused by soft dental plaque building up on the surfaces of teeth around the gums. The plaque contains bacteria that irritates the gum tissue. If the plaque is not removed it will often accumulate and lead to infection in the bones surrounding the teeth.

When the plaque is not removed, calculus or 'tarter' will form on the plaque. Tarter starts to form within a few days on a tooth that is not kept clean. The tarter then provides a rough surface that allows for even faster plaque accumulation. Once tarter begins to develop it is difficult to remove without dental instruments.

Fortunately, preventing tarter build up is easy to do when plaque is removed by frequently brushing your pet's teeth.

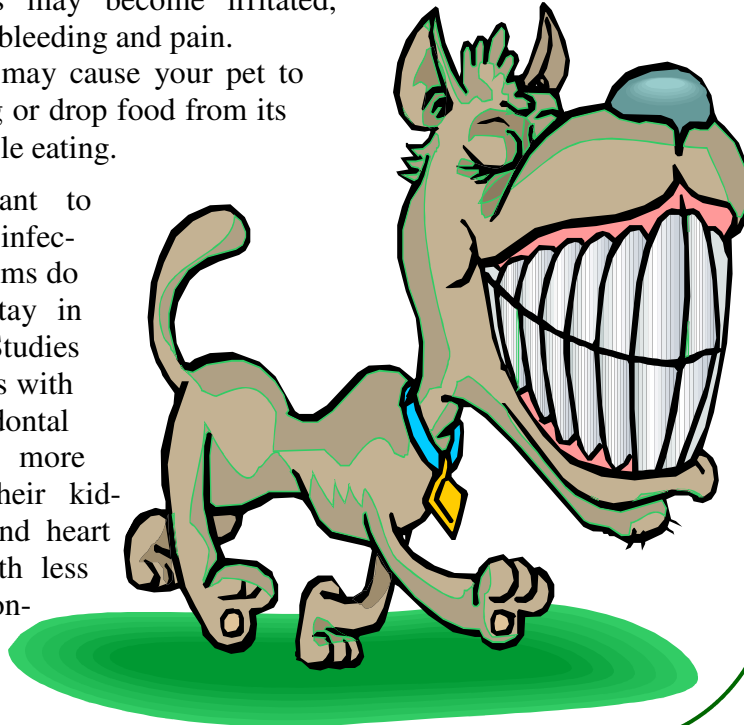


EFFECTS OF PERIODONTAL DISEASE

As a responsible pet owner you should routinely take care of your pet's dental needs and not wait for problems to occur. However, if you notice any of the following conditions you may need to make an appointment with your veterinarian before your routine examination.

- Bad breath is the most common effect that owners notice.
- The gums may become irritated, leading to bleeding and pain.
- Oral pain may cause your pet to stop eating or drop food from its mouth while eating.

It is important to know that infections of the gums do not always stay in the gums. Studies show that dogs with severe periodontal disease have more damage in their kidneys, livers and heart than dogs with less severe periodontal disease.



HOW MANY TEETH DO WE HAVE?

Dogs start out with 28 deciduous (baby) teeth and cats start out with 26. By 6 months of age these baby teeth fall out and are replaced by permanent teeth, 42 in the dog and 30 in the cat.

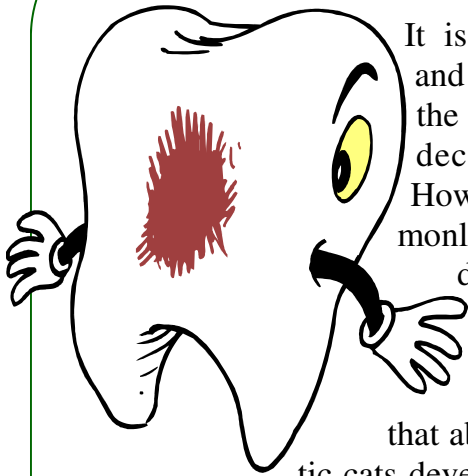
People start out with 20 deciduous (baby) teeth. People usually don't start losing their baby teeth until they are around 6-7 years old and typically will lose all of them around the age of 13. Their baby teeth are replaced by 32 permanent teeth.

GNAW IT OVER

Not only is periodontal disease the most common disease of our pet dogs and cats it is also one of the most neglected areas of pet health care. Below are a list of ideas to help you and your 4-H club in making pet owners more aware of the need to care for their pets teeth.

- Start by visiting your veterinarian for a dental health check up and beginning a daily routine of caring for your pet's teeth.
- Give a "Pet Dental Health" presentation at a 4-H communications contest.
- Give demonstrations of brushing your pet's teeth at the county fair, local pet store, local 4-H Cloverbud meeting, etc..
- Schedule a field trip for you and your club to visit a local veterinarian to hear from them about the importance of proper dental care for pets.
- Cooperate with your local veterinarian in planning and promoting an awareness campaign to recognize Pet Dental Health Month in February. Activities could include:
 - Holding a best pet smiles photo contest
 - Have a 4-H Cloverbud coloring contest
 - For more ideas and coloring pages visit www.petdental.com
- As you learn more about pet dental health take time to consider the similarities between how you should care for your pet's teeth and how you should care for your own teeth.

DO DOGS AND CATS GET CAVITIES?



It is very rare for cats and dogs to experience the same kind of tooth decay as humans. However, cats commonly do suffer from a different kind of cavity that is called a resorption lesion. Research shows that about 28% of domestic cats develop one of these lesions during their lifetime. The lesions begin at or below the gumline and cause the gums around the tooth to become red and inflamed. These lesions are extremely painful and require immediate veterinary care.

BROKEN TEETH

Broken teeth are very common in dogs and may occur in cats. According to dental experts, aggressive chewing on hard objects such as commercially available cow hooves is a primary cause of broken teeth in dogs.

Broken teeth are very painful if the pulp (root canal) is exposed. Additionally the exposed pulp becomes an entry point for bacteria to enter the tooth. Eventually the tooth will die and abscesses may form around the root of the tooth.

If your pet has a fractured tooth, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian as soon as possible.

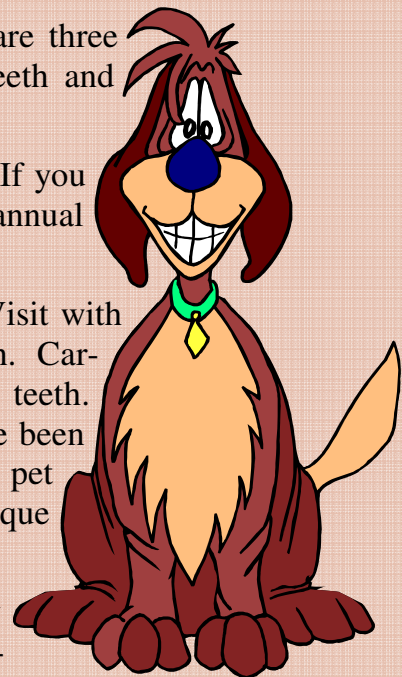
3 STEPS TO DENTAL HEALTH FOR YOUR PET

According to the American Veterinary Dental Society there are three steps that pet owners should follow to care for your pet's teeth and gums.

STEP 1—Take your pet to the veterinarian for a dental exam. If you think your pet is having a dental problem don't wait for his annual exam go ahead and schedule another appointment.

STEP 2—Just like you, your pet needs dental care at home. Visit with your veterinarian about how to properly care for your pets' teeth. Caring for your pets' teeth will include regularly brushing their teeth. Your veterinarian may also suggest certain chew toys that have been proven to be beneficial. They may also recommend certain pet feeds that have been designed to reduce accumulation of plaque and tartar.

STEP 3—Schedule regular veterinary checkups and possibly teeth cleanings. Just as regular visits to the dentist are important for people, regular visits to your veterinarian will help monitor your pets' dental routine. The frequency of pet dental check-ups will vary as some pets are more prone to dental problems than others. Your veterinarian will be able to advise you on the frequency of visits needed for your pet.

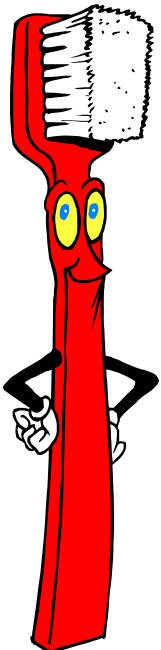


INTRODUCING BRUSHING TO YOUR PET

In order to prevent plaque from forming tarter, you should brush your pets' teeth every day. By brushing your pets' teeth daily you will remove plaque buildup.

The following are guidelines to help you learn how to brush your pets' teeth.

- Start young, the earlier you start brushing your pets' teeth the easier it will be for them to learn. However, it is just as important that our older pets learn too it may just require more patience.
- Go slow, be careful not to make them afraid of teeth brushing. These beginning steps should happen daily but only for brief amounts of time. Link this time with a reward like walks, or playtime.
- Introduce the brushing procedure by gently rubbing your fingers along the outside of their mouth when spending time with your pet. When your pet starts thinking this is normal attention try rubbing your fingers along their gums.
- Gradually, introduce gauze over your finger and gently rub their teeth in a circular motion.
- Now you can introduce a soft toothbrush designed for pets or an ultra-soft brush designed for people. When you begin using a brush only brush a few of the teeth, then offer lots of praise and reward. As your pet learns the brush is not something to be afraid of you can include more teeth.



- Brush gently at a 45 degree angle away from the gum line.
- Don't forget the toothpaste but make sure to use a toothpaste designed for your pet. Human toothpastes can cause your pet to have an upset stomach.
- Use only a very small amount of paste but replace it often.

Remember to be patient, it may take older pets several months of daily practice and reward to make them feel comfortable having their teeth brushed. If your pet feels afraid at any time during the training you should offer lots of comfort and take a break. Always leave the experience on a positive note.

CARE FOR YOUR OWN TEETH

Plaque, tarter, broken teeth, bad breath and gum disease are all problems that we have common with our pets. We only get one set of adult teeth and it's important that we protect them.



The American Dental Association® (ADA) recommends the following steps in caring for our teeth.

- Brush your teeth twice a day. Replace your toothbrush every three or four months, or sooner if the bristles are frayed. A worn toothbrush won't do a good job of cleaning your teeth.
- Floss your teeth daily. Tooth decay-causing bacteria still linger between teeth where toothbrush bristles can't reach.
- Eat a balanced diet and limit between-meal snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams.

For more information on caring for your teeth visit www.ada.org.

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