

# Pet Care Advice

## Teeth Can Last A Lifetime

We all know how important it is to take care of our teeth and to have regular check-ups to keep the need for dental treatment to a minimum.

Poor dental hygiene can affect our pets' health too. The main condition is periodontal or gum disease. This is caused when plaque and tartar build up on your pets' teeth. Plaque harbours the bacteria which can affect gum tissue and the roots of teeth resulting in disease and tooth loss.

As well as affecting the mouth itself, there is evidence to show that certain liver, heart and kidney diseases may be associated with these bacteria.

### Signs of Dental Disease

Any of the following may indicate that your pet has a dental problem:

- Halitosis (bad breath)
- Pawing at the mouth
- Plaque (not always visible unless stained)
- Bleeding, inflamed and/or receding gums
- Tartar (brownish hard material)
- Loose or missing teeth.
- Sensitivity around the mouth
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty chewing & eating food



The four main stages of dental disease in dogs and cats.

### **Mild Gingivitis**

The gum margin is inflamed and plaque is present on teeth. This can be reversed with preventative treatment.

### **Moderate Gingivitis**

The whole of the gum is inflamed and swollen. The mouth is painful and there will be a noticeable odour (Bad Breath). Veterinary treatment and effective home care can prevent irreversible damage.

### **Severe Gingivitis**

The gums are bright red, receding and may bleed easily. This is caused by infection and tartar and some damage may be permanent. Your pet's mouth will be very sore with obvious bad breath. It will have difficulty eating and may also paw at its mouth. Veterinary treatment is important.

### **Periodontal Disease**

Chronic bacterial infection is destroying the gum, tooth and surrounding bone. Bacteria will also be spreading throughout your pet's body and may damage the liver, kidneys and heart. Your pet is likely to appear poorly and uninterested in food. Veterinary treatment is essential.

**We offer FREE consultations with our qualified Veterinary Nurses who will teach you how to brush your own pet's teeth.**

# Pet Care Advice

## Dental Examination

The first stage of your pet's dental care is to have a thorough oral examination with a vet or nurse. They will identify any build-up of plaque and tartar and recommend a suitable course of treatment.

This may include changing your pet's diet, learning to clean its teeth and possibly some further veterinary dental procedures. If your pet's teeth are heavily stained and coated with tartar, it may be necessary for the teeth to be thoroughly cleaned and polished in order for the vet to assess the underlying condition of both teeth and gums. This process is similar to a 'scale & polish' at the dentist but for animals it is done under general anaesthetic. At this stage any broken, loose or rotting teeth may be extracted. Your pet will be able to go home the same day and will usually be able to eat normally.

## Preventing Dental Disease

### **Tooth Brushing**

An effective oral hygiene programme includes brushing your pet's teeth regularly with toothpaste and brushes specially formulated for animals. Do not use human toothpaste or baking soda as these can cause stomach and heart problems when swallowed. There are also flavoured abrasive toothpastes for cats. These do not require brushing but remove plaque as the cat licks it around its mouth.

The younger you start getting your pet used to teeth cleaning the better and it can be made into a fun game for puppies and kittens. For older pets our Veterinary Nurses will show you a step by step approach to introduce teeth cleaning.

Gently touch the outside of the mouth area on a regular basis using lots of praise.

Allow your pet to lick pet toothpaste from your finger as a 'treat'.

Using a 'finger brush' introduce the toothpaste to the mouth by raising the upper lip and brushing against an upper tooth in a slow circular motion.

Gradually increase the number of teeth cleaned each time.

Build up gradually with lots of praise and don't exceed your pet's tolerance level. 30-40 seconds brushing per side is ideal.

### **Diet**

This is also an important part of dental health care. Feeding your pet entirely on soft food may contribute to periodontal disease. Adding mixer to tinned food or feeding a dry, complete food is very beneficial in preventing a build-up of plaque and tartar. Some diets are specifically formulated to help keep teeth in the best possible condition. We recommend **Hills t/d** and **Hills Oral Care**.

### **Treats and Toys**

Beef hide chews, chew toys, 'Rask' biscuits for dogs and dental chews for cats are also very effective in preventing plaque. Ensure that any treats used for teeth cleaning are low in calories to prevent your pet putting on weight.

Ensuring that your pets' teeth are kept as clean as possible will help to make sure that their teeth really do last a lifetime.

