



We are all aware of the importance of good dental hygiene for ourselves, but many pet owners are surprised to learn that pets require dental care too. Poor oral health can affect the longevity and quality of your pet's life. Even if you don't already have a dental care regimen for your pet, it's never too late to start! Many oral problems can be prevented with simple at-home routines.

Pets need dental care, too!

What is periodontal disease?

- **This is the most common disease among adult dogs and cats:** 80 percent show signs of oral disease by age 3! Like with people, it's even more common as pets grow older.
- **Plaque and tartar accumulation** eventually leads to infection, destroys the gums, and ultimately results in the loss of teeth.
- **Severe periodontal disease can wreak havoc outside your pet's mouth, too:** it can result in systemic disease, affecting the kidneys, heart and liver.

How can you prevent periodontal disease?

- **Establishing good habits at a young age can prevent the disease from even occurring.** At-home dental care should be started when the pet is young and free of any signs of oral disease.
- **Preventive dental care at home** includes daily brushing with a pet-specific toothpaste. Human toothpaste contains ingredients that can upset a pet's gastrointestinal system, so it should be avoided. The staff at your veterinary hospital can recommend products and give you pointers on how to institute.
- **Many pets will accept** and even look forward to this one-on-one time with their owners, if introduced gradually.

- **If your pet will not tolerate brushing,** ask your veterinarian to recommend alternative oral care products that you can give your pet to clean his teeth: dental diets, treats, chews, toys, oral rinses and water additives. Be sure you use only products approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council.

What signs should you watch for?

- Bad breath
- Abnormal drooling
- Bleeding gums
- Pawing at the face or mouth
- Plaque and/or tartar accumulation
- Change in eating habits or difficulty chewing
- Subtly subdued behavior

What should you do if you notice these symptoms?

- **Do not wait** until it is time for your pet's annual exam! Schedule an appointment with your veterinarian to evaluate your pet's oral health and recommend treatment.
- **A thorough oral exam and dental cleaning** will likely be recommended. This requires general anesthesia, so pre-anesthetic blood work to evaluate organ function will be recommended as a precaution.