

DENTAL CARE FOR YOUR CAT



All of us know about the benefits of routine dental care for ourselves. Daily brushing and flossing, and regular visits to the dentist, keep our teeth and gums healthy and comfortable. Unfortunately, routine dental care is still an often neglected item of cat's general health care. Your cat, as well as yourselves, deserve regular dental care.

After your cat reaches a few years of age, tartar begins to build up at the junction of your cat's gums and teeth. If this tartar is not removed, it increases until it undermines the tissue and causes receding gums. The area then becomes infected, which is called periodontal disease. Infection leads to foul breath, as well as pain and a constant unsavory taste for the pet. If the situation is not soon remedied, severe gum infections, abscessed teeth and cheek ulcers will develop. Regular dental cleanings are a must for all pets. Periodontal disease is entirely preventable with good oral care.

Chronic infections of the teeth and gums result in problems elsewhere in the body. Bacteria enter the bloodstream from infected teeth and cause infection in organs such as the liver, the kidneys, the heart and the joints. Good dental care lengthens pets' lives an average of 10 - 20% through the prevention of these secondary problems.

Cats are especially prone to gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and feline oral resorptive lesions (FORLs), a type of cavity that occurs at the gum line and eventually destroys the tooth. As a result of mouth pain cats may stop eating and show weight loss and nutritional disturbances.

You can help prevent dental problems in your pets by feeding a dry pet food. Some diets, such as Hill's T/D and many Iams foods have been proven to reduce plaque and calculus (also known as tartar) build-up in clinical trials, (If no studies were done to prove a product works, don't believe what it says on the label about its benefits!) Daily, or at least weekly, brushing of your cat's teeth with a toothpaste made for pets will also help prevent tartar buildup.

Just as with people, your pets will still require regular dental exams, and cleaning or extractions as necessary. Under anesthesia the teeth are cleaned with an ultrasonic dental scaler much like the one your own dentist uses, and then polished. Polishing smoothes the surface of the teeth to help discourage future tartar formation. Your cat will also receive a fluoride treatment to help strengthen the teeth. Have your cat's teeth cleaned as soon as mild to moderate tartar is present.

Other more advanced procedures such as root canal work, restorations and even braces are also available should your cat ever need them. We encourage you to be concerned about your cat's oral health, and to keep in mind the availability of effective treatments for dental problems. Make dentistry apart of your pet's total health care plan, for a longer and happier life.