

# Dental Care

- Without routine dental care, most dogs and cats develop periodontal (dental) disease by 3 years of age.
- Periodontal disease is the most common health problem in dogs and cats.
- Bad breath may be a sign of periodontal disease in your pet.
- Providing routine dental care for your pet can be easy and can benefit your pet's oral and overall health.

### What You Need to Know

Bad breath in pets may be a sign of periodontal disease that could lead to other health problems. Periodontal disease starts when plaque (a bacterial film) coats the tooth. Plaque hardens (calcifies) into tartar, a thick yellow or brown layer on the teeth. Tartar can irritate the gums, creating an environment where bacteria thrive. As the disease progresses, the gums become tender, red, and swollen and the bacteria continue to multiply. Eventually, the inflamed gums pull away from the teeth, creating pockets that trap more bacteria and food particles. The gums bleed, the roots of the teeth may become exposed, teeth may become loose, and your pet may feel pain when eating. If the bacteria enter the bloodstream, they can create problems for organs such as the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys.

### Signs of Dental Problems

- Bad breath
- Sensitivity around the mouth
- Loss of appetite
- Yellow or brown deposits on the teeth
- Bleeding, inflamed, and withdrawn gums
- Loose or missing teeth
- Pawing at the mouth or face
- Difficulty chewing

### What to Do

Your pet needs routine dental care from your veterinarian and you. Annual veterinary checkups are essential for helping your veterinarian monitor your

pet's dental health, but don't wait for a checkup if you suspect a problem. After an examination, your veterinarian may recommend a dental prophylaxis (tooth cleaning) for your pet. Anesthesia and pain medication are used for dental procedures. If dental disease is severe, your veterinarian will recommend the best treatment, which may include tooth extraction.

Pets are never too young to start having their teeth brushed at home; in fact, the younger they are, the better. Slowly and gently introduce your pet to toothbrushing. It should be a bonding experience that is reinforced with praise and rewards. Begin by rubbing your pet's teeth and gums with soft gauze wrapped around your finger. Gradually switch to using a specially designed pet toothbrush or baby toothbrush with pet toothpaste (do not use toothpaste for people because it can upset your pet's stomach). If your pet is most at ease on your lap, keep his or her toothbrush next to the chair where you sit together. Focus on your pet's gum line, and work up to 30 seconds of brushing for each side of the mouth at least a few times a week. If your pet won't tolerate brushing, your veterinarian can recommend plaque-preventive products for your pet.

There's no substitute for regular brushing, but feeding dry food can help keep your pet's teeth and gums in good condition. In addition, special plaque-reducing foods, treats, and toys can help. The Seal of Acceptance from the Veterinary Oral Health

### Ways to Prevent Periodontal Disease in Your Pet

- Take your pet to annual veterinary checkups
- Brush your pet's teeth or use plaque-reducing products at least a few times a week
- Feed dry food
- Provide plaque-reducing foods, treats, and toys

## Preventive Care

Council appears on products that meet defined standards for plaque and tartar control in dogs and cats. Ask your veterinarian for recommendations.

Caring for your pet's teeth can have several benefits. For example, a few minutes of brushing each week can help give your pet a longer, healthier life.