

SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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DENTAL HEALTH AND YOUR PET

It's hard to believe but four out of every five dogs and cats over the age of three years have some sort of dental disease which may go unnoticed by their owners. While many people believe that bad breath is normal for their furry friends, it can be an indication of dental disease.

WHAT CAUSES DENTAL DISEASE?

Dental disease, or periodontal disease, begins when bacteria in the mouth forms a substance called plaque and sticks to the surface of the teeth. Following this, minerals in the saliva harden the plaque into tartar which is firmly attached to the teeth. This tartar build up occurs above and below the gum line and over time can lead to destruction of the supportive tissues (gingivitis – inflammation of the gums) and jaw bone (periodontitis – loss of bone and soft tissue around the teeth).

SIGNS OF DENTAL DISEASE

Signs that your pet is living with dental disease include:

- bad breath
- difficulty eating or loss of appetite
- discoloration, plaque or tartar build up on teeth
- discomfort, lumps or bleeding around the mouth and face.
- redness and inflammation of the gums
- scratching or pawing at the mouth

SECONDARY COMPLICATIONS

If left untreated, severe dental disease can lead to secondary heart, liver and kidney problems which can all have a significant impact on your pet's quality of life and longevity.

HOW IS DENTAL DISEASE TREATED?

Treatment of periodontal disease is multifaceted and may require several different approaches. If there is only a small amount of plaque present, correction may be possible following the advice of your veterinarian in regards to the combined use of dietary changes, increase in dental chews and teeth brushing.

If there is a large amount of tartar or plaque present, a professional dental clean may be required. This dental clean under general anaesthesia involves a thorough oral examination, scale and polish of all teeth as well as diagnosis and treatment of any abnormalities. Extractions of rotten or fractured teeth may be required and radiographs may also be needed in patients with extensive disease. All examination and treatment findings are recorded on a dental chart.



HOW CAN I PREVENT MY PET FROM GETTING DENTAL DISEASE?

Regular checks with your veterinarian will help to identify any development of periodontal disease. Some general ways that you can help keep your pets mouth healthy are listed below.

Teeth Brushing

Brushing your pet's teeth daily is considered the gold standard for dental care. We understand that this is not for every pet or pet owner however if started from an early age, most pets will consider the process normal. A specially designed toothbrush or finger brush combined with a pet friendly toothpaste is a must.

Prescription Dental Diet

Feeding your pet a premium diet such as Hills Science T/D that has been specifically designed to reduce the accumulation of plaque on their teeth is the first step in ensuring a healthy mouth. This diet is a complete and balanced source of nutrition (no other supplements are required) that has a number of key benefits. It has a brushing effect on the teeth through the shape, size and texture of the biscuits, it controls tartar by effectively reducing plaque deposits and the diet also promotes bone, joint and digestive health.

Dental Chews

Greenies dental chews are an excellent and very tasty treat for your pet that help to control both plaque and tartar build up, freshen the breath and maintain healthy teeth and gums. Specifically designed for both cats and dogs in different shapes and flavours, they are made with a balanced blend of highly soluble and digestible proteins that will combine well with your pets current diet. The specifically designed shape and texture of the chews encourages pets to manipulate the product in their mouth and around their teeth for effective cleaning.



Chew Toys

Chew toys are a great way to satisfy your dog's natural desire to chew whilst having a small impact on their teeth. From Kong toys to rawhide chews, there is something suitable for most pets however it is important to choose the appropriate sized chew for your pet and regularly check for any damage that indicates the toy should be thrown out.

Bones

Bones can be useful in preventing and treating mild plaque build-up in dogs however it is important to be very particular about the type of bones your provide.

- The larger the bones the better. Large beef thigh bones which still have the knuckles attached are excellent for your pet to gnaw on though remember to remove them after 3 days as when they start to dry out there is a chance the bones may splinter.
- Small bones such as pork bones, rib bones, chicken wings and necks can be swallowed whole by most dogs. If not chewed adequately these large pieces can become lodged in the throat or intestinal tract causing a life threatening obstruction.
- Brisket bones contain a lot of cartilage and are often too soft to provide the desired teeth cleaning in larger dogs
- Bones cut to expose the marrow can be sharp and are not advised as marrow is high in fat and not only does it provide little dietary nutrition but can lead to weight gain and pancreatitis.
- NEVER feed your pets cooked bones! These can splinter when chewed and cause a life threatening obstruction in the throat or intestinal tract.
- Be mindful of aggression and fights that this high value treat may cause between your pets and be prepared to supervise or separate your dogs if necessary.



Home oral hygiene combined with professional dental care will improve the periodontal health of your pet and decrease the progression of disease. When properly cared for, teeth can remain healthy for longer and the risk of associated health complications can be reduced. If you are concerned about your pet's oral health be sure to book an appointment to see your veterinarian today.

This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.

It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your pet's health.