

Downers Grove Animal Hospital & Bird Clinic, P.C.

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Dental Hygiene

First the good news: cats & dogs seldom develop cavities, as do humans. However, the dog and cat are not without a major dental problem. In fact, the most common dental problem that we find in pets is considered far worse than cavities! It is called Periodontal Disease. This disease affects the gums and other tissues around the teeth, instead of the teeth themselves.

About 75% of all dental problems serious enough to be seen by a veterinarian, (and almost all teeth lost), are the result of periodontal disease. It is the cause of 95% of all cases of "bad breath", and affects 80-85% of dogs and cats over the age of 3. In advanced cases, it results in infected, foul-smelling, loosened teeth; with a massive, unsightly accumulation of tartar. Often there is a loss of appetite due to painful gums. Even signs such as diarrhea, vomiting and irritability may be the result of this disease.

Food material, bacteria, and saliva accumulate and adhere to the tooth surface, forming a soft "plaque". This material can be easily removed with routine brushing. However, if buildup is allowed to continue, this plaque becomes hard and chalk-like tartar. Tartar buildup causes erosion of the gums, with subsequent inflammation and infection of the tooth socket. The teeth then become loose, and may even fall out. The gums become reddened, swollen, and bleed easily. The animal often salivates excessively from the associated pain.

The buildup of this material allows bacteria to constantly grow in the infected mouth tissue. These bacteria may enter the bloodstream through the bleeding gums; and cause such problems as: heart valve infections (endocarditis) and kidney infections (nephritis).

Periodontal disease is often very painful for the animal, as well as causing it to be unpleasant due to the bad mouth odor.

Follow these tips for good oral hygiene:

1. Feed at least some hard food, which will provide a cleaning action. Prescription Diet t/dTM is available for both dogs and cats and can be used as a treat every day.
2. Have teeth examined at least once every year for tartar buildup. Pets vary considerably in the amount of tartar that accumulates.
3. Use a pet dentifrice on a regular basis. Nothing will slow down the progression of periodontal disease more effectively than daily tooth brushing. We will be happy to discuss strategies to help you to train your pet to accept tooth brushing. We also carry palatable toothpaste for your pets that should help to make this a pleasant experience. Do not use human toothpaste as it can be toxic if swallowed. We also have helpful alternatives for those animals who simply will not accept tooth brushing.

These recommendations will probably do more to prolong your pet's life
and make it more enjoyable than anything else you can do!