



Healthy Mouth, Healthy Pet!



How your pet's oral health affects your pet's overall health

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Introduction

Great advances in health care for pets have occurred during the last 20 years. Better dental care has been a large part of these advances including better treatment of gum problems (periodontal disease), oral cancers, occlusion problems (orthodontics), and even root canal therapy (endodontics). In spite of all these advances, dental diseases are the most under diagnosed and under treated problems of dogs and cats. The 2 main reasons for this under treatment are lack of symptoms of the dog or cat and fear of the need for general anesthesia to treat most of these diseases.

It is not possible to provide proper periodontal care in dogs and cats without *general* anesthesia. Attempting to do so will cause unnecessary pain to the patient. Instruments should not be used below the gum line in sedated or awake patients. Attempting to do so will lead to discomfort for the patient and result in under treatment of the disease. Not treating all the teeth and subgingival tissues is a poor service to the patient. In order to ensure that general anesthesia is safe, several precautions must be taken. First the pet should be given a physical status using the **American Society of Anesthesiologists Physical Status Scale**. This requires a physical examination and an evaluation of a blood profile by a veterinarian. Patients with a grade of 1 or 2 only have a 0.05% chance of a serious problem with the anesthesia. Second, an intravenous catheter should be placed so fluids can be given to help maintain normal blood pressure. Third, the pet should have a constant monitoring of vital signs during anesthesia. (EKG, Oximetry, Blood Pressure). A system to maintain body temperature should also be used. Forced warm air and heated water blanket systems are best.

What are the consequences of not treating dental diseases in dogs and cats?

This is a very good question considering most dogs and cats show little in the way of symptoms, even when their teeth are fractured (broken) or severely infected, even with serious bone loss around multiple teeth.

Studies have documented that dogs with periodontal disease have degenerative changes in their hearts and kidneys. Further, this damage is more severe in dogs with more severe periodontal disease. Kidney disease is the #1 reason dogs die prematurely. Untreated fractures and resorptive lesions lead to unnecessary pain and infection. In humans, untreated dental disease is linked to heart disease, strokes, diabetes and even Alzheimer's disease. In fact, in humans periodontal (gum) disease affects three out of four adults. Clinical studies have linked periodontal disease and the associated inflammation with these serious diseases.



Dogs

- 75% over 2 years old have Grade 2 Periodontal Disease
- 35% have fractured teeth

Cats

- 70% over 2 years old have Grade 2 Periodontal Disease
- 50-70% have Resorptive Lesions

The Veterinary Oral Health Council
www.vohc.org



Ok, enough about periodontal disease. What other problems are likely to hurt my dog or cat?

50-70% of cats have resorptive lesions on at least 1 tooth. These painful lesions eat away at the enamel and often cause the tooth to fracture. They start below the gum line and require a dental x-ray for diagnosis. The cause is currently not known. Most teeth with resorptive lesions must be removed.

30-40% of dogs have at least 1 tooth that is fractured. This is usually caused by chewing hard objects like bones or ice. A dog's tooth enamel is actually thinner than a human's so they should not be allowed to chew anything hard, especially bones (cooked or raw), cow hoof, and nylon or rawhide bones.

Most teeth which are fractured should be removed or restored (root canal therapy).

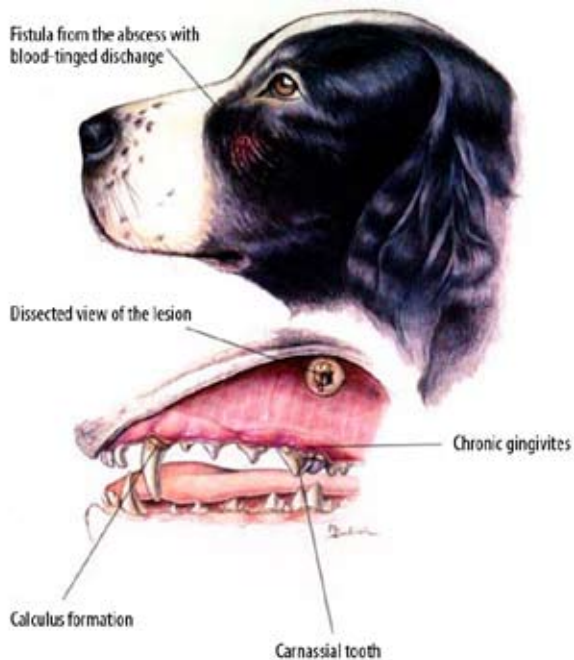
5-10% of dogs and cats have other conditions in the mouth including cancer. Most cancers of the mouth are malignant making early detection and diagnosis essential if the patient is going to have a good outcome after treatment.

If your dog or cat has not had a good oral examination by a veterinarian in the past 6 months, make an appointment and tell the veterinarian you want a thorough examination of the mouth and teeth of your pet.

Ok, I have had the examination and veterinary dental cleaning with teeth polishing and x-rays performed on my pet. Now what can I do to keep periodontal disease from coming back?

Glycoproteins in the saliva coat the teeth within hours of cleaning or brushing (pellicle). Normal bacteria invade the pellicle forming plaque. Within 24 to 48 hours bad bacteria invade the plaque causing gingivitis. Minerals from saliva incorporate into the plaque causing tartar (calculus). Brushing must be performed daily to slow pellicle formation and reduce the frequency of cleaning under anesthesia. Soft bristled tooth brushes are best at getting into the tooth/gum margin (sulcus). Your veterinarian and veterinary technician can help you to train most dogs and cats to allow daily brushing. Can you imagine how your mouth would feel if you never brushed or flossed your teeth?

There are many rinses, sealants, diets and chews which can help dogs and cats decrease periodontal disease, but *none* can replace *daily* brushing. *Nothing interrupts* the pellicle and plaque formation like *daily* brushing. The most effective rinses and chews contain chlorhexidine. Talk to your veterinarian about the best choices for your dog or cat. Visit the Veterinary Oral Health Council website for more information (www.vohc.org). 🐾



Carnassial Tooth Abscess

Diagnostic Plan

History
Physical examination
Oral examination

Therapeutic Plan

Tooth extraction

Dietary Plan

A diet based on overall patient evaluation including body condition and other organ system involvement
A soft diet may minimize postsurgical pain

Image courtesy of Hill's Atlas of Veterinary Clinical Anatomy