

Canine Dentistry

I was totally unaware that dogs have dental problems. Is it common?

Dental disease is the most common disease in dogs and cats. Over 68% of all pets over the age of three have some form of periodontal or dental disease. Most pets will show few signs of dental disease. It is up to the pet's family and veterinarian to uncover this hidden and often painful condition.

Are dental problems the same in pets and people?

No. In man the most common problem is tooth decay which, due to the loss of calcium from the enamel, results in painful infected cavities. In the dog decay represents less than 10% of dental problems, the majority of which are caused by periodontal disease.

What is periodontal disease?

This is simply inflammation or infection of the tissues surrounding the tooth. Accumulation of tartar (calculus) on the teeth contributes to gum recession around the base of the tooth. Infection soon follows and the gums recede. Untreated infection then spreads into the tooth socket and ultimately the tooth loosens and is lost.

Is periodontal disease very common?

It is estimated that over 68% of dogs over three years old suffer from some degree of periodontitis, making it by far the most common canine disease.

What is tartar and can it be prevented?

The mouth of all mammals is home to thousands of bacteria. Many of these bacteria will breed on the surfaces of the tooth and form an invisible layer called plaque or biofilm. Some of this is removed naturally by the dog's tongue and chewing habits but if allowed to remain the plaque thickens, becomes mineralized and is then visible as tartar (calculus). The tartar presses on the gums, which recede, and the bacteria then result in gum inflammation and infection (gingivitis). The gums continue to recede until ultimately the socket is infected and the tooth is lost.

As the oral infection increases tonsillitis and pharyngitis can also occur. In addition, the bacteria are absorbed into the blood stream and can be carried to other organs. Heart valve infections (endocardiosis or endocarditis), kidney and liver problems are frequently due to bad teeth.

Can tartar be prevented?

Plaque is mineralized in some dogs much quicker than others. Special canine toys as well as feeding the newer dental diets help reduce tartar build up, as does regular home care - tooth brushing. Today there are many products designed to reduce tartar in our dogs.

Will feeding dry food remove tartar?

Once tartar has formed it will be necessary to remove it with a professional scaling and polishing under anesthesia. There are exciting new dental diets that can help reduce the formation of plaque and tartar in your pet.

What is involved with a dental cleaning for my dog?

The goal of dental scaling and polishing is to remove the tartar and invisible plaque. We will perform pre-anesthesia blood tests to ensure that kidney and liver function are satisfactory. Sometimes antibiotic treatment is instituted before full dental prophylaxis is carried out. We will be happy to discuss this with you.

Tooth scaling will be performed both by hand and using ultrasonic cleaning equipment to remove tartar both above and below the gum line. The tartar beneath the gum line causes the most significant gum recession. The teeth are then polished in order to help prevent subsequent plaque build-up. It may be necessary to carry out other procedures at the same time such as extractions and special applications such as fluoride may be indicated to decrease tooth sensitivity and strengthen enamel.

These procedures will be fully discussed both before your pet's dental cleaning and when you bring your pet in for the procedure. We will need a telephone number where you can be reached during the dental cleaning so that we can discuss any additional work that may be indicated once we begin.

Do I have to make an appointment for my dog to have a scale and polish?

Yes. We will perform pre-anesthesia blood tests and examine your pet for any other underlying disorders.

How can I prevent tartar accumulation after the procedure?

Plaque and tartar begin forming in as little as six hours after your pet's dental cleaning. We recommend beginning a home dental care program for all pets. We will provide you with detailed instructions on how to brush your pet's teeth.

Can I use human toothpaste?

Do not use human dentifrice or toothpaste on any account. These are foaming products and are not meant to be swallowed. Additionally, many types of human toothpaste contain sodium, which may cause problems in some pets.