



**MALVERN
VET
HOSPITAL**



Malvern Veterinary Hospital
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DENTAL DISEASE:

Dental disease is more common in pets as it is in people. The most common form of dental disease in humans is decay or cavities. In our pets the most common problem is periodontal disease. This occurs when tartar builds up and causes irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth. The resulting inflammation is called gingivitis. As this progresses, the gums recede exposing the roots which leads to infection and ultimately tooth loss. Other problems encountered include tooth fractures and tooth resorption. Tooth resorption holes are more common in cats and cause dental pain. These cats seem to have a normal appetite but find it painful to eat.

Isn't it correct that pets that eat dry food don't have tartar build-up?

Dry food, as well as dental chews and other gnawing toys, do reduce the amount of tartar accumulating on the teeth due to the mechanical abrasive action. However once tartar has formed, professional cleaning under a general anaesthetic is necessary in order to remove it. One of the main factors determining the amount of tartar build-up is the individual chemistry in the mouth. Some patients need yearly cleanings; others need a cleaning only once every few years. Tartar is the result of a build up of soft plaque on the teeth which mineralizes and hardens over time. Just like us, dental home care does reduce plaque formation and hence tartar accumulation. The best way to do this is getting your pet used to having his/her teeth brushed regularly (however most cats are difficult). There are other ways to keep the teeth clean if your pet doesn't cooperate with brushing. Keeping the teeth clean will result in less general anaesthetics for cleaning and polishing throughout their life and less tooth loss due to dental disease. It is well worthwhile discussing dental hygiene for your pet with your veterinary surgeon.

What does tartar do to the teeth?

If tartar is allowed to remain on the teeth, several things may happen. The tartar will cause the gums to



recede, exposing the tooth root. The tooth attachment weakens and even surrounding bone is lost. This allows the teeth to loosen in their sockets and infection to enter the root socket. The teeth will loosen and fall out or have to be extracted.

Infection will accumulate in the mouth, resulting in gingivitis, tonsillitis, and pharyngitis (sore throat). Although antibiotics may temporarily suppress the infection, if the tartar is not removed from the teeth, infection will return quickly. Infection within the mouth will be picked up by the blood stream and carried to other parts of the body. Some kidney and heart disease can be caused by this infection as well as chronic bronchitis.



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What is involved when cleaning your pets teeth?

Proper cleaning of the teeth requires complete co-operation of the patient so plaque and tartar can be removed properly. General anaesthesia is required to thoroughly clean the teeth. Although anaesthesia always carries a degree of risk, the modern drugs in use in practice today minimise this risk, even for older patients.

There were three steps in the cleaning process:

Scaling removes the tartar above and below the gum line. This is done with ultrasonic cleaning equipment and hand instruments.

Polishing smoothes the surface of the teeth, making them resistant to additional plaque formation.

Flushing with an antiseptic removes dislodged tartar from the teeth and helps to remove the bacteria that accompany tartar.

What do I need to do if my pet has had teeth removed today?

If teeth have been removed, you may have some gum sensitivity for about 5 days. Patients are given a strong opiate pain relief before surgery so it is working before pain is caused. Local anaesthetic is injected in the nerve supplying the effected tooth before removal to numb the area and onsiar (anti inflammatory pain relief) is given as an injection before recover form anaesthesia. Most patients go home with pain relief and antibiotics if teeth have been removed. Please feed soft food for 5 days. Avoid bones for 2 weeks. The mouth heals faster than skin as it has a much better bloods supply and most pets appear back to normal in 1-2 days. Some patients may have stitches in the gums which dissolve. If you are worried about your pet we are happy to check how the mouth is healing 5-7 days later for you at no charge.

How do I brush my pets teeth?

Begin with a rubber finger tooth brush with rubber bristles and pet toothpaste. Flavoured dog and cat toothpaste is useful, it provides abrasive action and has no fluoride so it can be swallowed. Don't use human toothpastes as they contain fluoride which can accumulate and become toxic if swallowed. Lift the lip up and gently rub over the tooth and gums with a circular motion. You may have to pull the gums back to reach the back teeth. Brushing of the outside of the teeth (where you can see) is all that is required. Cats can be much more difficult but some cats will allow this..

What else helps protect my pets teeth?

Plaque and tartar accumulation can be minimised by the regular feeding of dental chews and Hills Prescription T/D dry food. We recommend Hills t/d dry foods for patients who have had tartar. Hills t/d kibble has cris-crossing fibres that stop the kibble from shattering and mechanically clean the teeth as the dog/cat chews. Other products that help with teeth cleaning are daily Greenies or Dentibones for dogs and dentibits for cats. These dental chews are designed to clean teeth as they are chewed. Large raw bones can help too, however these bones and the marrow contain a lot of fat which can cause stomach upsets and obesity and some dogs can fracture teeth on large bones.

If you have any questions, please phone on 9509 7611.
