

Dental disease

What is dental disease?

Dental health problems are quite common, research shows that at around the age of 2, 80% of dogs have some sign of dental disease. Problems usually start with a build-up of sticky plaque that hardens to form tartar. If the tartar is not removed, this can lead to gingivitis (painful and inflamed gums), and eventually leads to periodontal disease. Pets may lose teeth and be prone to infections that may affect other organs in the body.

Before the dental



After



Does my pet have dental problems?

- Bad breath
- Broken or loose teeth
- Extra teeth or retained baby teeth
- Teeth that are discoloured or covered in tartar
- Abnormal chewing, drooling, or dropping food from the mouth
- Reduced appetite or refusal to eat especially pellets/treats
- Pain in or around the mouth – often they will yelp if they chew something hard
- Pawing or rubbing the mouth
- Bleeding from the mouth
- Swelling in the areas surrounding the mouth especially under the eyes (tooth root abscess)

Some pets become irritable when they have dental problems, and any changes in your pet's behaviour should prompt a visit to your veterinarian. Always be careful when evaluating your pet's mouth because a painful animal may bite.

What causes dental disease?

Plaque, a colourless film on your pet's teeth, causes bad breath and gum disease. Because pets do not brush their teeth like humans do, this plaque can cause tartar build up, which results in gingivitis (swollen, red and inflamed gums). As the condition progresses your pet can develop periodontal disease, which destroys the gums and tissue that support his teeth and the damage becomes irreversible and the affected teeth may need to be removed.

The condition is serious, but do not worry, dental disease is preventable and treatable in most pets. Regular check-ups are thus important to pick up on problems before they become severe.

Factors that can increase the risk of dental disease include:

Age: Dental disease is more common in older pets but can start as early as 2 years old

Breed: Smaller breeds or brachycephalic breeds (flat faced pets) are more likely to have overcrowded or misaligned teeth that are difficult to keep clean, making them more prone to dental disease.

Food: Feeding sticky foods or only soft foods can lead to a more rapid build-up of plaque. Pellets act as a natural toothbrush to scrape some plaque off when the animal chews.

Behaviour: Cage biting or stone chewing can result in damaged teeth

Trauma or injury: such as a car accident or fight

Previous illness or disease: pets with kidney disease or diabetes or more prone to develop secondary complications such as dental disease

Prevention is better than cure. The first step is to book a consultation with your veterinarian. After the surgery, your vet may recommend feeding a special dry dog food such as Hills T/D. These foods are made of larger pieces (pellets) with a special matrix that scrape the teeth clean as your dog eats them and acts as a mini toothbrush. You may be asked to start brushing your pet's teeth regularly (see our Tips for Keeping Your Dog's Teeth Clean & Healthy).



What to expect on dental day

The process begins with a consultation with the vet to evaluate your pets' dental condition and if your pet has any problems that would make anaesthetic risky. Pre-anaesthetic blood tests are performed if warranted or requested. Once under general anaesthesia an in-depth oral exam is performed. Radiographs (x-rays) may be needed to evaluate the health of the jaw and the tooth roots below the gumline. A thorough dental cleaning is performed with special dental equipment. Dental cleaning includes scaling (to remove dental plaque and tartar) and polishing. If warranted teeth may need to be extracted. All patients are kept on a drip (intravenous fluid therapy) to help them recover better.

Most pets can go home the same day of the procedure, although they might seem a little groggy for the rest of the day. They also receive adequate pain medication and a free check-up in 10-14 days. If extractions were performed, we use dissolvable stitches that take 2-4 weeks to dissolve.

Post surgery they may have some blood or saliva from the mouth for a few days and we recommend feeding soft food for 3-7 days. They will also need to be confined and monitored for 1- 2 days. Most pets are back to their usual selves within a day. Special post op care will be discussed in the dental discharge specific to your pets' condition such as special food or tooth brushing.

Don't hesitate to ask us about Dental Health & Disease