

Could your pet be suffering from dental disease?

Poor dental health is a common and preventable problem in many of our cats and dogs – as many as 80% of cats and dogs will suffer from some form of dental disease by the age of 3 . Regular checks of your pet's mouth at home can help you recognise these signs before it gets too advanced.

Signs to look for:

- Bad breath
- Plaque/Tartar build-up (a yellow/brown matter on the surface of the teeth)
- Reddening of gums/bleeding gums
- Difficulty eating (dropping food/salivating excessively)
- Lethargy/lack of energy
- Painful/sore mouth



What is dental disease?

After eating, a layer of sticky bacteria (plaque) forms on the surface of the teeth. Without brushing, this hardens as tartar, providing a rough surface ideal for further bacterial growth. This then leads to gingivitis (reddening of the gums). If left, this level of disease can develop further into early periodontitis, where gums may become detached from the tooth and create pockets, leading to further bacterial growth and plaque build-up. These stages are reversible with a professional scale and polish procedure and subsequent home dental care.

If early periodontitis is left untreated it will progress to advanced periodontitis, at which point tooth roots may become exposed and abscesses may form where the gum recedes. This is very painful and will often result in the need for extractions under general anaesthetic.

Bacteria formed in the oral cavity can enter the blood stream via the inflamed gums and can lead to the disease of other organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys.

Regular brushing of teeth is the single most effective means of preventing plaque build-up and therefore the most effective way to prevent the development of periodontal disease. We recommend starting this at a young age in cats and dogs to get them used to the procedure, but it can be well accepted later in life too. There are other products which we can recommend if brushing really isn't an option for your pet for any reason. These include exploring diet, chews and even changing the types of toys they play with!

How to clean your pet's teeth:

Stage 1: Gently stroke your pet's cheek and slowly lift their lip for a few seconds – praise and treat after this each time and gradually build up the time you hold the lip for.



Stage 2: Introduce a pet-specific toothpaste* - put some on your finger and allow your pet to lick it off. This can be done in conjunction with stage 1. **Note: The fluoride in human toothpaste is toxic to animals*

Stage 3: Start introducing your finger inside your pet's mouth (with or without toothpaste) and gently rub around the gums/teeth at the side of the mouth.

Stage 4: When your pet is happy with stage 3, introduce the toothbrush gradually – finger toothbrushes are useful as they are already used to your finger, or otherwise a long-handled toothbrush. Move it gently around the gums/teeth for 15 -30 seconds, again praising and treating your pet after each time.



Stage 5: Gradually increase the time exposed to the toothbrush with the pet toothpaste and begin to gently brush the back teeth.

Stage 6: Once your pet is happy with the process, the aim should be to spend about 1 minute on each side of the mouth with active brushing making it part of their daily routine.

Depending on the individual animal, each stage could take anywhere between 1 day to several days to achieve. Only move onto the next stage when your pet is completely happy.

Handy tips:

- Only proceed at the speed that your pet will accept – don't rush it
- Praise and treat after each session to make it a positive experience
- Start with the back teeth and work towards the front, as front teeth are more sensitive
- Try to incorporate teeth brushing into your daily routine by picking a time that suits you – it doesn't matter if it is done before or after eating
- If there are any signs of discomfort or aggression from your pet, stop and seek advice from your vet



PLEASE REMEMBER THAT HUMAN TOOTHPASTE SHOULD NOT BE USED