

ACCES for Pet Health

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Dental Disease & Emergency Medicine

By Dave Gill, DVM

Pet owners often do not pay enough attention to their pet's dental health. It is easy to understand this. After all, if your pet seems happy, healthy, comfortable, and is eating well, it is hard to imagine anything could be wrong. But it is a startling fact that by the age of 2 years 80% of dogs and 70% of cats have some form of periodontal disease. 10% of dogs at this age have a broken tooth with nerve exposure, a painful condition that eventually leads to tooth root infection and tooth loss. The inflammation and associated infections of periodontal disease and tooth root abscess can lead to bacteremia (bacteria that escape into the blood stream) and spread of infection elsewhere in the body.

Periodontal disease has been associated with numerous critical problems such as strokes, kidney disease, liver disease and many others. A recent article in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association demonstrated that animals with severe

periodontal disease may be at much greater risk for several types of heart disease. Because of these facts, good dental health in pets can lead directly to better health and longer life.

In addition to systemic illness, oral disease can also cause inflammation and pain behind the eyes. Jaw bone loss from chronic infection can lead to a pathologic jaw fracture and these do not heal well. Finally, infectious oral disease can result in osteomyelitis (an area of dead, infected bone), nasal infections and an increased risk of oral cancer. All of these are painful conditions often requiring an emergency room visit.

The signs of periodontal disease are subtle and often missed until the disease is advanced. The first sign is redness or swelling of the gums. The teeth start accumulating tartar and plaque as well. Unless you are looking at your pets teeth regularly, you would not notice this. As the disease progresses, the swelling and infection worsens. The gums recede and teeth get loose. This is often accompanied by foul breath. The pet may become reluctant to eat hard food and may bleed when chewing on toys. By the times these symptoms are noticed, the disease is quite advanced. Expensive and prolonged treatment is needed at this point to maintain good health.



Ignoring your pet's teeth can lead to serious illness and a trip to the Emergency Room.

Prevention is far better than needing to have your pet seen on emergency. Good dental health starts with a good dental exam by your veterinarian. This can identify any problems and help to start your pet on a regular routine. Routine brushing of your pet's teeth is



very important. This is an easy and painless procedure. It is best to start early but an older cat or dog can easily become accustomed to the process. Your regular veterinarian can help you learn the proper technique and products for brushing your pet's teeth. *It is important not to use regular human toothpaste for pets.* Regular cleaning by your veterinarian is also necessary to keep teeth and gums healthy. Special diets are available to promote good dental health.

Good care of your pet's teeth can lead to a longer more comfortable life. Be proactive and make an appointment for a thorough dental exam with your veterinarian.

Resources:

At your next visit to the vet, ask about dental care for your pet! [Pet Dental Health Campaign](#)
[Pet Education.com](#)

Posted by **Christina Ryan** at March 24, 2009 6:54 p.m.

· [Return to Dental Disease & Emergency Medicine](#)