



DANADA VETERINARY HOSPITAL, P.C.

Dental Disease

Dental disease is a common and often overlooked problem in dogs and cats. While cavities are the most common dental disease of humans, pets are more frequently affected by tartar buildup on the teeth. Tartar is the hardening of plaque on the teeth. When tartar accumulates, it leads to irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth. This leads to gum recession, tooth loss, and infections.

Contributing Factors

The main contributing factor to dental disease is the individual anatomy and/or chemistry of the mouth. Every pet's mouth is different from the next. Some have more bacteria in their mouth than others. Others may have crowded or misaligned teeth that allow tartar to accumulate easier. This is especially true with Brachycephalic breeds such as pugs, bulldogs, etc. Smaller dogs and cats develop tartar faster than large dogs simply because they have the same number of teeth in a smaller space.

Lack of at home dental care also leads to the development of dental disease. Proper brushing will not prevent the need for professional cleanings, but the frequency of such cleanings is reduced by simply brushing the teeth every 1-2 days. The longer bacteria and plaque are allowed to sit on the surface of the teeth, the more likely they are to harden into tartar.

Diet plays only a small role in dental tartar formation. Wet food will stick to the teeth more readily than dry food. This allows for easier plaque formation. However, regular brushing will counteract most of the effects of diet on the teeth.

Clinical Signs

The most common initial symptoms of dental disease are visible tartar (brownish mineral deposits on the surface of the tooth), gum inflammation and/or bleeding (gingivitis,) and bad breath (halitosis.) All these signs are reversible with professional cleaning. However, if allowed to persist these changes can lead to permanent damage. The inflammation eats away at the gum tissue and the ligament that secures the teeth in place. This leads to gum recession, tooth loss, and sometimes infections of the mouth if given enough time. If the loss of attachment or root exposure is severe, dental disease can cause loss of appetite, drooling, and an increased facial sensitivity. In extreme cases, infection can get trapped under the tooth, or even enter the bloodstream causing infection of other areas of the body.

Treatment

Beginning at one year of age, a professional oral health exam and dental cleaning is recommended annually by the American Animal Hospital Association. Just as with other aspects of veterinary health

care, prevention is the best medicine. Proactive dental procedures are the best way to ensure a healthy mouth for your pet throughout life. Professional cleanings performed after initial signs of dental disease (bad breath and gingivitis) are noted will result in reversal of many symptoms, but some detachment of the tooth from its ligament will occur at this time. This will mean a more rapid accumulation of plaque, tartar, and gum disease in the future. Once gum recession begins, changes are permanent, and dental cleanings will require removal of diseased teeth to prevent further damage.

During the comprehensive dental procedure, the mouth and throat are inspected for any abnormalities such as malocclusion (inappropriate closure/alignment of teeth), tumors, abscesses, and fistulas (communications between the mouth and nasal passage). Any loose or broken teeth are assessed and treated/removed as needed. Radiographs (x-rays) are used to assess the health of a tooth under the gum line or to check for non-erupted teeth when necessary. Remaining healthy teeth are scaled using a high-speed handpiece that removes the tartar from the surface and below the gum line. Once all teeth are cleaned and treated, a fluoride polish is applied to slow future tartar build-up.

Given the multitude of steps involved in a dental treatment, anesthesia is required. We understand that many owners have a high degree of anxiety related to general anesthesia for their pets. While there is always a degree of risk with any anesthetic, we strive to do all we can to minimize this risk. Our hospital uses short-acting anesthetics that are safe for dogs and cats of all ages and most health conditions. We also perform a full physical examination and check a pre-surgical blood screening at no additional cost. These steps help to rule out pre-existing health conditions such as heart murmurs, liver problems, kidney disease, and/or diabetes which might make anesthesia riskier. IV fluids are administered to all patients to help maintain blood pressure, and warming blankets are used to maintain proper body temperature during the procedure. At all times, from the start of the procedure through the post-op recovery, your pet is under the direct supervision of both a doctor and a veterinary technician or surgeon's assistant.

Prevention

Several preventive measures can be taken to aid in oral hygiene for dogs and cats. These include:

Having your pet seen regularly by a veterinarian - Every visit we perform an examination that includes an inspection of the mouth. We can advise you about the significance of any dental changes and help you decide when a professional cleaning is necessary. Early intervention is the key, as it lessens both the anesthetic risk and the cost of the procedure. Severe dental problems require much more anesthetic time and money to correct.

Brushing the teeth at home - Brushing can be done using a regular brush and water. Brushing every 1-2 days is the most effective way to delay the need for professional cleanings. If desired, special toothbrushes (such as finger-tip brushes) and flavored toothpastes are available. If you have questions on how to brush, our assistants can demonstrate it for you.

Feeding a dental diet called Hills Prescription T/d - This diet consists of large kibbles that slide against the teeth to remove plaque and tartar. It is the only food proven to help slow the progression of dental disease, and it is only effective if fed as the main source of nutrition for your pet. It will not

clean the teeth as well as a professional cleaning, but it will prolong the interval between professional cleanings. T/d is available through our office.

Note: Despite popular belief, commercial dry dog and cat foods and chew toys/treats have minimal impact on slowing dental disease progression. Most diets and chews fail to apply friction to the gum line. Therefore, they fail to prevent buildup of tartar where it matters most.

Using products endorsed by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) - This group of veterinary dental experts has reviewed and endorsed a multitude of options that have been shown to help reduce plaque and/or tartar formation in dogs and cats. A list of endorsed products is available at VOHC.org.