

Dental Care for Pets

Taking care of your pet's teeth is as important as looking after your own. It is critical to your pet's wellbeing that he/she has proper dental care from a young age.

Without proper dental care, your pet can suffer from inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) and the tissue surrounding the teeth (periodontitis).

It is extremely painful and can be associated with health issues, ranging from tooth root abscesses and tooth loss, to more serious bacterial infections of the heart, liver and kidneys.

Unfortunately, dental disease is largely unrecognised by owners and yet it is one of the most commonly detected problems in pets visiting TAH.

This stresses the need for proper dental care from a young age, as dental disease can seriously impact a pet's health.



Regular brushing, a good diet and occasional check-ups are crucial to ensure good dental health and fresh breath for your pet.

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Teeth Health Stages

Dental health can be divided into:

- Grade 1: These cases have mild to moderate tartar build-up and are the ideal candidates for dental treatment in our clinics as they are easy, reasonably priced and the best option for both owner and pet.
- Grade 2: These are the cases where it's obvious we will have 1–2 surgical extractions, for example, a tooth root abscess, a fractured tooth with root pulp exposed (fractured teeth with just enamel and dentin exposed do not need extracting and sometimes we only need to smooth the surface a bit), or moderate to severe tartar build-up with the potential for extractions.
- Grade 3: This stage is characterised by poor breath and the pet displaying signs of lethargy.

Brushing the teeth removes plaque but not tartar, so if your pet's teeth do have tartar, your vet will have to remove it with professional cleaning and polishing, usually accomplished under anaesthesia. The first choice will definitely be to start with dental care early so that tartar is minimised or prevented.

Signs of Dental Disease

In addition to brushing your pet's teeth regularly, it is very important to go for annual health check-ups, as your vet will be able to spot any problems and can assess the dog's dental health and advise accordingly. Signs to look out for when you suspect dental disease include:

- Yellow and brown tartar deposits on the gum line.

- Pain that leads to a change in behaviour e.g. more snappy, quieter and not wanting to exercise as much as normal.
- Changes in eating habits e.g. chewing on one side of the mouth, dropping food and not chewing favourite toy.
- Rubbing and/or pawing face.
- Loose teeth or difficulty eating.
- Halitosis or bad breath.
- Inflamed, red and/or bleeding gums.
- Tumours in the gums or cysts under the gums.
- Swollen and bleeding gums.
- Reluctance to play with favourite toys.
- Failure to groom themselves.

Brushing your Pet's Teeth

Regular brushing, a good diet and occasional check-ups are crucial to ensure good dental health and fresh breath for your pet. Brushing will be easier if you begin while your pet is still young, as he or she will get used to it.

You can take care of your pet's dental health at home by:

- Using a specially designed pet toothbrush or a recommended alternative. Never use human toothpaste.
- Teaching your pet that toothbrushing can be fun by first getting him used to having your fingers in his mouth. Dip your finger into something your pet likes, such as soft food or pet-friendly peanut butter.
- When your pet seems comfortable having your finger in his mouth, apply a small amount of toothpaste to your fingertip.
- Once your pet tolerates the feeling of your finger and the toothpaste, you can graduate to a soft pet toothbrush.
- Teach your pet that he or she will be rewarded once he/she gets his/her teeth brushed.

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SOURCE: Hill's Pet Nutrition

A Nutritious Diet

Your veterinarian may recommend the use of special dry food to reduce plaque and tartar build-up, especially if your pet is prone to dental problems. This may mean supplementing your pet's food with additives that help keep plaque from hardening, or dried food that helps scrub your pet's teeth as he chews.

Additional Products

There are specially formulated treats and products that can reduce tartar and prevent the onset of periodontal disease, but note that these will be in addition to regular toothbrushing, and not instead of it. Don't let your pet chew on hard materials like bones or stones as they can damage the teeth and cause infection in the gums.

Cost of Dental Prophylaxis

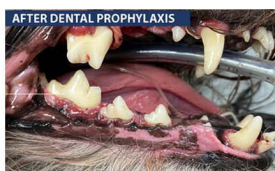
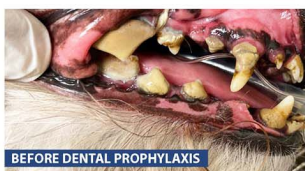
One issue that always comes into question when discussing dental treatment is the costs and pet owners often do not understand why the costs can be relatively high. Reasons for this include:

- Unlike in people, pets' teeth are cleaned under general anaesthetic. The anaesthetic level needs to be closely monitored—the same as with any surgical procedure. This means that we need extra staff to monitor the patient, and extra equipment to administer the anaesthetic gas. A professional fee for the anaesthesia is also charged.
- When most of us visit a dentist or oral hygienist, we can't even see the tartar build-up on our teeth, because we brush our teeth at least twice a day. The condition of our pet's teeth is generally much worse than this by the time we get to treat their mouths, and this means that it is usually a more difficult situation to try to reverse or treat.
- Dogs and cats' teeth are seated much tighter in the bone than humans and to remove a tooth a vet effectively needs to perform maxillofacial surgery.

Dental Prophylaxis

Besides regular brushing, a dental prophylaxis procedure performed under general anaesthesia (where the veterinarian examines and cleans the teeth) is needed on an annual basis to assess the pet's overall dental and mouth health.

- The veterinarian will conduct a pre-anaesthetic physical examination to minimise risk and may advise blood tests to confirm the pet's health before the procedure.
- In elderly pets that have underlying medical problems, placing a drip is frequently desirable.
- After inducing anaesthesia, an airway tube is placed in the pet's mouth, extending to the airways, to prevent saliva, water, plaque and tartar from running into the lungs.
- Pets' teeth are thoroughly cleaned and descaled with an ultrasonic scaler to remove plaque and tartar, and then polished to smooth off rough surfaces.
- Pets with teeth that require extraction are given a local anaesthesia and the teeth are extracted.
- If performed before significant disease is present, these procedures last less than 30 minutes and carry very little risk for your pet.
- If dental disease is advanced, the procedure can be long and complicated, emphasising the need for early intervention.



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