

February is National Dental Health Month

Have you looked at your pet's teeth lately? Bad breath is the most common reason that owners even glance, but have you opened up her mouth, pulled up the gums and really looked? Often, bad breath is only the tip of the iceberg and a mere symptom of more severe underlying issues. An astounding 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show signs of oral disease by age 3, according to the American Veterinary Dental Society (AVDS).

Gums can become irritated, leading to bleeding and oral pain. Roots may become so severely affected that some teeth become loose and fall out. Bacteria surrounding the roots can gain access to the blood stream ("bacteremia"). Studies have shown that severe periodontal disease in pets can be a significant source of inflammation and infection and is likely to lead to damage in their kidneys, heart muscle and liver.

The key to management of dental disease (for both humans and pets) is prevention. As long as the surfaces of the teeth are cleaned frequently, the gums will stay healthy. You and I brush our teeth at least twice daily and get routine periodontal cleanings every 6 months. In comparison, how often do your pet's teeth get cleaned? If you aren't actively performing preventative dental care, your pet may only get his teeth cleaned by the veterinarian every few years, which is the equivalent of you never brushing and simply having your dentist clean your teeth every 20 to 30 years. Yuck!

Steps you can take to ensure good oral care for your pet include:

1. Take your pet to the veterinarian for a thorough dental examination. This exam can identify potential problems, such as plaque and tartar buildup or gingivitis, as well as determine if a dental cleaning or periodontal treatment is indicated. (For the month of February, Aspen Ridge Animal Hospital will be offering FREE dental oral examinations with a dentistry trained and qualified technician).
2. Schedule a dental cleaning with your veterinarian if recommended.
3. Begin a dental care regimen at home. The gold standard is brushing however daily chewing activities and use of plaque control products can also be effective. The Veterinary Oral Health Council has approved certain products such as Science Diet Tartar Diet (T/D) to control dental plaque so look for the VOHC seal when you are buying your pet's dental products. Remember, not all "teeth cleaning" products work as expected, regardless of claims to the contrary.
4. Schedule regular veterinary checkups. A pet ages the human equivalent of 7 years in a 12 month span so make sure to schedule exams at least once a year and more frequently as your pet enters his golden years.

What is involved in a professional dental cleaning for your cat or dog? It is quite a bit more complicated than a human teeth cleaning. Be sure your pet receives the following as recommended by the American Animal Hospital Association:

By Dr. Elizabeth Ellis
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Dr. Elizabeth Ellis can be found most days at Aspen Ridge Animal Hospital in Lakeside, AZ. She is a passionate lover of animals, outdoor enthusiast, and connoisseur of great movies, popcorn and generous portions of Milk Duds.

- General anesthesia in order to fully evaluate and treat the entire mouth.
- Pre-anesthetic blood work to ensure your pet is healthy enough to undergo the procedure. There are several case studies showing that skipping this step before undergoing general anesthesia can result in the death of your pet.
- Intravenous (IV) fluids to maintain blood pressure and flush the bacteria that are released during the procedure out of the body.
- Vital signs monitoring by qualified veterinary technician.
- Scaling of all tooth surfaces with an ultrasonic scaler and hand scaling of beneath the gum line.
- Inspection of each tooth and entire oral cavity by veterinarian.
- X-Rays to evaluate the half of the tooth that lies beneath the gum line. Often early disease starts on the root of the tooth which isn't visible to the naked eye. Your pet may have a fracture, abscess, or decay that wouldn't be detected without these important x-rays.

- Surgical extraction of diseased teeth with local anesthesia, sectioning of multi-rooted teeth with high speed dental drill and closure of remaining space with antiseptic and sutures. This technique prevents any tooth fragments from being left behind which can lead to a variety of complications.
- Low speed polishing of all teeth to "buff" out any micro defects.
- Fluoride treatment.
- Referral to Board Certified Veterinary Dentist if appropriate.

Your pet will wake up with a sparkly clean mouth, healthier body, and the bad breath will be a thing of the past.

Preventing and treating periodontal disease is not only important to the overall health of pets but also may affect their longevity and quality of life. Remember, pets have teeth too and it is our responsibility to care for them.

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ASPEN
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Animal Hospital



Pet owners can feel reassured about the care their pets receive at an AAHA-accredited hospital, such as Aspen Ridge Animal Hospital. Not only do we meet AAHA standards, but we go above and beyond by providing 24 hour emergency services, monthly continuing education to our entire staff, long appointment slots to spend additional time with owners and their pets, and complete multi-modal pain control for our patients. We are dedicated to offering the best care to our patients and clients, staying on the leading edge of veterinary medicine, and providing the range of services you and your pet deserve.

