

Dental Disease

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Why does dental disease matter?

Dental disease matters because it is painful. We all know someone who has had a toothache or cavity. Our pets have nerves to their teeth, just like us. If it would hurt in your mouth, it will hurt in their mouth, too – they just can't tell us, unless we know what signs to look for.

How common is dental disease?

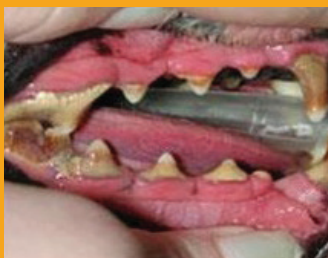
Extremely common. By two years of age 85% of cats and dogs have some form of dental disease.

Why do they need a general anaesthetic to clean their teeth?

A general anaesthetic allows us to perform a full examination of your pet's mouth that they would not tolerate awake, and allows us to thoroughly clean all the surfaces of their teeth, including beneath the gum line. We can probe the gum line and teeth looking for any cavities or signs of dental disease which quite often can be hidden from plain sight. Due to the type of plaque and tartar buildup that animals get, veterinarians use an ultrasonic scaler to clean your pet's teeth. This is the same machine that some human dentists use on your teeth. It squirts water and emits a high-pitched sound as it works. Most animals would not tolerate this awake.

What happens during a "dental scale and polish" under general anaesthetic?

We start by examining the mouth fully to assess whether there are any abnormalities, such as gum disease, loose or rotten teeth, cavities, fractures or missing teeth. This way we not only develop a treatment plan specific to your pet, but we can also advise you on future prevention of problems. If there are specific problems that require dental X-rays, we will then perform them. Dental X-rays are recommended with any pet with dental disease, to pick up subtle problems early – similar to how we get dental X-rays done regularly. A "dental scale" is performed using an ultrasonic scaler. This machine has a tip that vibrates at a high frequency, allowing us to thoroughly remove any tartar or plaque on your pet's teeth. We clean all tooth surfaces, inside and out, as well as under the gums. We finish by polishing your pet's teeth to leave a nice smooth surface which reduces groove formation in the enamel. If the teeth are not polished, micro-grooves are created that tartar quickly accumulates in. A smooth enamel surface means their teeth stay tartar free for longer.



Dog's teeth before dental cleaning



Dog's teeth after dental cleaning

Why brush my pet's teeth?

Brushing your pet's teeth reduces the buildup of plaque and tartar, which can develop rapidly. This keeps their teeth cleaner for a longer period of time. This means less scale and polish procedures are needed during the life of your pet. If you aren't sure that brushing is an option, speak to our staff about other homecare options.

What happens in the wild?

Some animals are lucky and don't get much dental disease. Most in the wild have plaque and tartar buildup causing gum inflammation. As the gum inflammation progresses, the gum surrounding the tooth recedes and can lead to cavities, infections, broken teeth and abscesses (pus filled infected areas around the tooth root). The animal will continue to eat because it needs to in order to survive. Sometimes infected teeth will fall out after a substantial period of discomfort, or the animal will continue to cope with chronic mouth pain. There is no need for pets to suffer this dental pain.

Why can't I just give bones?

In the past, bones were used extensively to keep teeth clean. Yes, the abrasion of rubbing their teeth on a solid object does help clean their teeth. However, a number of dogs and cats do break their teeth on bones resulting in pain and subsequent infection. Fractured teeth often need extraction. Some pets get the bones stuck in their mouths, throat or stomach. Other dogs get constipated, which at the worst may require a general anaesthetic to remove the impactions! For these reasons, we do not routinely recommend chewing bones to counter dental disease.



6 SIMPLE STEPS TO BRUSH YOUR PET'S TEETH:

Select the flavour of toothpaste you are going to use (chicken or malt) and introduce it to your pet on your finger as a treat. Make it fun and encourage them to lick it.

Gently rub their incisors and canines (front teeth) with the toothpaste on your fingers.

To be most effective, brush them every day.

Gradually, over the next few days, start to move your finger down the sides of their mouths to rub the back teeth with your finger and toothpaste.

Focus on rubbing the outside of all the teeth (top and bottom). This is where most tartar accumulates.

Move on to a soft bristle toothbrush (such as a veterinary-approved toothbrush or a child's soft toothbrush) or finger brush and continue brushing your pet's teeth.