

# DENTAL



## Importance of dental care

We all know the importance of dental hygiene with ourselves and it is just as important for our pets - but they need your help. Bad dental hygiene not only impacts on their teeth, gums and mouth but can have implications for the rest of their bodies including major organs. Dental problems are one of the most common ailments; it is estimated that 80% of cats and dogs over 3 years old show signs of dental disease.

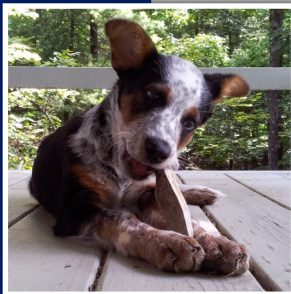
## Periodontal disease



Periodontal disease is the most common complaint. It is bacterial infection affecting the gums and bone around the tooth and is caused by the build up of plaque. Plaque is a mixture of bacteria and proteins derived from saliva and food which naturally accumulate in the mouth, where it sticks to the teeth. It can be easily removed with brushing, but after 48 hours the plaque starts to calcify and becomes a grey or brown hard substance called calculus (tartar) which is difficult to remove. The bacteria and tartar build up causing the gums to become inflamed (gingivitis) and to recede. Eventually this progresses to infection and destruction of the tooth socket. This damage is irreversible and painful, often leading to the loss of teeth. The bacteria associated with periodontal disease can also enter the bloodstream, and there is evidence it can cause damage to major organs including the heart, liver and kidneys.

## Other dental problems

### Fractured teeth



Our pets use their mouths for everything! This can mean they carry, chew on or catch objects that are harder than their tooth enamel. Tooth fracture is more common in dogs but can happen in cats too. Teeth can be fractured (broken) by playing with stones or hard balls, accidental hits or collisions while chasing a ball, chewing on cooked bones or antlers or by a twisting force when dragging something large like a tree branch. If the fracture exposes the pulp (the nerve), it will be painful and they will need veterinary attention. The exposed pulp can be seen as a red or black spot on the tooth.

### Worn teeth

Worn teeth are seen most commonly in dogs. It is caused by excessive chewing or obsessively carrying objects. The more abrasive the object the faster the wear on the teeth. A small amount over time is not a problem but if it is more rapid it can expose the pulp, which is often painful. Dogs which exercise on a beach are more at risk due to the abrasive sand coating toys. Teeth with pulp exposure will require veterinary attention.

### Tooth discolouration



Tooth discolouration usually happens due to necrosis (death) of the pulp inside the tooth. It can vary from a darker yellow to grey or pink. It happens in the same way as tooth fracture but instead of the tooth enamel actually fracturing (breaking), the trauma is confined to inside the tooth and damages the pulp. It is more common with dogs but can happen with cats too. Tooth discolouration requires veterinary assessment.



### Tooth luxation

This is the traumatic loosening of a tooth in its socket. There may also be tears in the gum and possibly damage to the bone around the tooth. Luxation usually occurs where there has been large sideways force such as dragging a large tree branch, tugging on toys and occasionally getting caught in another dog's collar during play. Although more common in dogs, cats can also suffer tooth luxation. Veterinary attention is required.

### Juvenile gingivitis

This affects young cats. In some cats, the eruption of their adult teeth triggers an abnormal inflammatory response of the gums surrounding the teeth (gingivitis). This is treatable with veterinary care.

### Feline chronic gingivostomatitis

This is only seen in cats. It is an abnormal inflammatory response to plaque accumulating on the teeth. It causes severe inflammation to the whole mouth, not just the gingiva (gum line around the teeth). Veterinary treatment is needed for these cases.

### Resorptive lesions

This affects more than 1/3 of adult cats (occasionally seen in dogs) and second to periodontal disease is the most common dental problem. This painful condition involves the progressive destruction of the tooth structure usually starting at or below the gum line. It can continue into the tooth crown, down into the root or both. This makes the tooth weak and more likely to break, exposing the sensitive pulp (nerve), and causing pain.

Tooth resorption can be hard to spot in the early stages as the damage is inside the tooth. Later on, it can appear as a hole in the tooth or look as if the gum is growing over the tooth. However when the destruction is below the gum line, it can only be diagnosed with a dental x-ray.

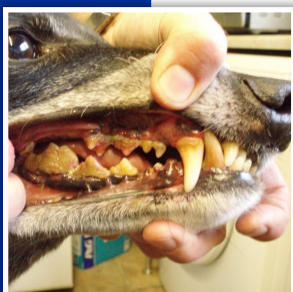
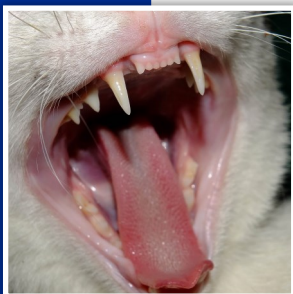
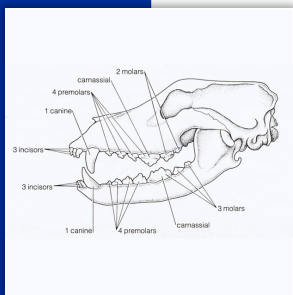
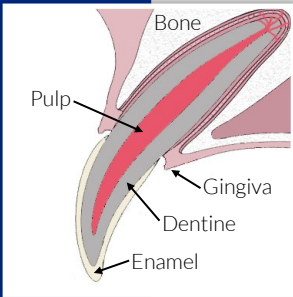
Resorption usually occurs with multi-root teeth (pre-molars or molars) but it can happen in other teeth. Scientists have been unable to determine the exact cause and therefore hard to prevent (although good dental hygiene is recommended).

Resorption lesions are progressive and causes irreversible damage. Treatment for resorptive lesions involves tooth extraction by a Veterinary Surgeon.

### Signs of dental problems

- Bad breath—contrary to popular belief, it is not normal for pets to have bad breath. It is usually a sign of periodontal disease.
- Red, inflamed or bleeding gums
- Loose teeth
- Calculus (tartar) build up - grey/brown hard substance on the surface of the teeth
- Receding gum line
- Excessive drooling
- Difficulty eating or will only eat soft food or only chew on one side of their mouths
- Subtle changes in behaviour - being less sociable, less playful etc
- Face rubbing or pawing
- Reduced grooming in cats

Your Vet will check your pet's teeth regularly at their annual vaccination visit. As well as looking for signs of periodontal disease, they will also look closer for signs of fracture, pulp exposure and the more subtle changes that happen with resorption lesions and pulp necrosis. If you are concerned about your pet's dental comfort, please book an appointment.



## Toothbrushing

Regular toothbrushing at home significantly reduces the risk of periodontal disease and its complications. It is most effective as a preventative measure, brushing off the plaque before it gets a chance to calcify and become tartar. Training for toothbrushing is best done when they are young as they will more readily accept this strange new feeling, but it can be achieved with older pets. Here's our tips on how to train your pet to accept a toothbrush.

### Toothbrushing tips

- Get your pet used to having their face handled – rub and stroke your pet's face around the mouth regularly – don't forget to reward them with play or a small treat. Repeat daily for at least 5 days.
- Start by using your fingertip with a little pet toothpaste. Keeping your pet's mouth closed, begin with the canine teeth and work backwards down the inside of their cheeks. Do this gradually over the course of a few sessions. For now ignore the inside surface of the teeth and the small incisor teeth at the front, they are often the most difficult.
- Once your pet is happy with this, start to include the incisor teeth in your routine
- Progress to a specially designed toothbrush when your pet is comfortable with the finger brushing
- You may now also include the inside surfaces of the teeth when they are used to the toothbrush
- Start young – it is generally better accepted. BUT it's never too late – older pets can learn too
- Be patient – it's a strange sensation for our pets and it takes time for them to accept
- ONLY use Veterinary approved toothpaste

**WARNING** Be sure to use Veterinary approved toothpaste - human toothpaste often contains xylitol which is poisonous to dogs and fluoride which can be harmful to both cats and dogs.

### Other dental products

Along with pet specific toothpaste and toothbrushes there are products on the market specially made for our pets' dental health. Like brushing, dental chews and specialist food help to will clean off the plaque by the mechanical action of chewing. Certain toys will also encourage chewing and therefore the removal of plaque.

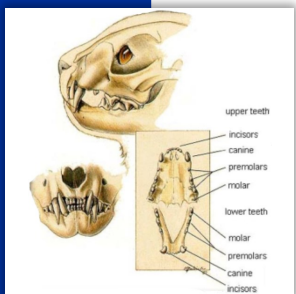
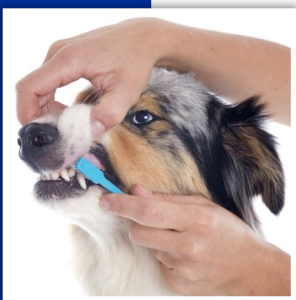
Plaque-off® is a useful product to use in conjunction with chews, food and toothbrushing. It is a natural supplement derived from algae which reacts with the plaque and calculus on teeth and making it softer and easier to remove. (Please note, heavy accumulation of plaque and calculus will still need veterinary dental treatment).

### Veterinary dental treatment

We recommend all dental problems are assessed by a Vet to determine cause and severity. Mild cases of gingivitis, periodontal disease and worn teeth can be managed at home with extra care, toothbrushing and specialist products. More severe dental problems and advanced cases of periodontal disease, will need veterinary treatment.

The pet is put under general anaesthesia for the procedure. The Vet can then fully assess each tooth, perform ultrasonic cleaning (scaling) and extract any non-viable teeth (those that are necrotic, loose or badly damaged). X-rays can also be taken if necessary.

**If you have any questions about your pet's teeth, please speak to a member of our team at any of our surgeries.**



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