

DENTAL CARE FOR PETS

Attention to your pet's teeth is just as important as ensuring flea control, regular worming and vaccinations.

Pets often have bad breath which is usually due to dirty teeth.

Animals rarely suffer from bacterial tooth decay compared to humans, but they do suffer from dental scale or tartar. Tartar is an accumulation of hard scale that coats the teeth. In severe cases the scale causes extensive gum inflammation and erosion and loosens the teeth. This change is often not reversible and in such cases the teeth may need to be removed.

These problems can be prevented.

The scale can be removed by your veterinarian. Some animals, with only small amounts of scale, will allow it to be removed without anaesthetic. However, in the majority of cases a light anaesthetic is necessary to ensure a thorough cleaning.

The scale will often chip off easily, especially in cats, leaving a sparkling clean, white tooth beneath.

In cases of severe tartar accumulation and infection, the bacteria on the gums enter the blood stream and lodge on the valves inside the pet's heart. This causes a potentially dangerous situation when the animal is anaesthetised prior to the teeth being cleaned. For this reason, your vet will issue a course of antibiotics for a few days prior to the operation to clear up any infection present and to make the anaesthetic safer.

Following the teeth cleaning it is advisable to feed your pet more solid food and less canned food. Although canned food is a good diet, it is so soft that it has no teeth cleaning action at all.

By comparison, dry dog or cat biscuits are ideal as they keep the teeth quite clean.

Large bones are also a good teeth cleaner. A large marrow bone given to dogs every two weeks will ensure dental health. Do not give T-bones, chop bones, chicken or fish bones. Raw bones are better than cooked.

TEETH CLEANING

You should consider cleaning your pet's teeth each day. You can use a rag wrapped around your finger or a brush but do not use toothpaste as the animal is likely to either object to the taste of it or to swallow some of the paste.

Hydrogen peroxide mixed with water or baking soda makes a good cleaning agent. The fizzing action of the peroxide loosens food particles attached to the animal's teeth and also bleaches them white.

You should regularly inspect the teeth of your young puppy or kitten as young animals often retain their puppy or kitten eye teeth while the adult teeth are growing through.

The baby eye teeth (canines or fang teeth) should fall out at about 4 months of age. If the baby teeth do not fall out, the growing adult teeth may be forced out of position to the extent that they might rub against each other and cause excessively rapid wearing.

DENTAL CHECKS

Old dogs and cats should have their teeth inspected regularly. Old animals can suffer from a variety of dental problems including tumours of the gum; excessive scale formation; a smouldering cat flu; infection of the gums in cats; or bad breath due to kidney malfunction and tooth rot abscesses, especially following the breakage of a tooth.

There are certain breeds of dogs that are more prone to tooth problems.

Poodles get more than their fair share of dental scale, and the squat nosed breeds such as Boxers, Bulldogs, Pekingese and Pugs have problems as nature tries to squash the normal number of teeth into the very small and deformed mouth that these animals have been bred with.

Such breeds should have dental check ups at least every 12 months.