

## *It's about more than just a pretty smile...*

Your pet -- like most of ours -- probably has a sparkling personality. But have you looked at his/her teeth lately?

Unless you brush your dog's or cat's teeth regularly -- three or more times weekly -- they probably are accumulating plaque and tartar that can lead to bad breath, dental disease and gingivitis.

If left untreated, those conditions can cause serious health problems, just as in humans. Besides tooth loss, severe periodontitis can lead to heart, kidney and liver disease in your four-legged friends.

The good news is that preventive and pro-active dental care can help keep your pet healthier. Even the ill effects of dental disease can be largely reversed if caught early and treated aggressively. That includes taking preventive measures to help clean your pets' teeth at home, as well as regular dental exams and professional cleanings by one of our veterinarians.



Photos of dog before and after Stage 1 dental procedure

As plaque and tartar start building up on your pet's teeth -- which happens with even the most diligent preventive care -- it's important to remove the visible accumulations of bacteria.

During dental cleanings, filmy plaque and hard layers of tartar are removed from the teeth by a trained technician using ultrasonic scaling equipment. The teeth are then polished and finally treated with fluoride to help strengthen the enamel against decay. A veterinarian oversees every procedure, and reads all x-rays and performs all extractions.

Dental cleanings generally take only 45 to 60 minutes, unless extractions or extensive repair are required. Because the procedure is done under general anesthesia, it is considered a surgical procedure and requires pre-medications and recovery observation, resulting in an all-day stay at the veterinary hospital. Animals are carefully monitored throughout the surgery, and are gently nursed through their recovery.



Photos of cat before and after Stage 3 dental, requiring multiple extractions

In addition to regular cleanings, your veterinarian has several recommendations for preventive care, starting early when your pets are puppies and kittens, and as a means to help maintain a healthy mouth after professional cleaning. (over)

Preventive care includes:

a) regular toothbrushing with specially formulated toothpaste that pets can safely swallow. For this option to be effective, teeth need to be brushed at least three times a week. Starting when pets are young makes them more tolerant of the routine; generally it's we humans who are less adaptable to the routine.

b) offer tooth-cleansing treats, such as C.E.T. chews. These rawhide chews are treated with an antibiotic cleanser that helps break down plaque-causing bacteria as your dog or cat gnaws on them. The chewing action also helps clean teeth and exercise gums. Best of all, pets love them!

c) special dental diets, such as Hill's T/D diet. The kibbles in this brand are larger than in most regular diets, but they're also softer and more "explosive." As your dog or cat bites into each morsel, the specially formulated food acts as a squeegee, then crumbles into lots of tooth-cleansing bits. You may choose to supplement your pet's regular diet with a tooth-cleansing diet, or even offer the individual kibbles as rewarding treats.

As pets progress beyond adolescence, veterinarians generally recommend that they have their teeth cleaned annually, though more frequent cleanings may be necessary if an individual pet is particularly prone to dental disease. Some lucky dogs (and cats) may need dentals less often!

Talk to one of our staff about your pet's dental care. After all, it's not just about maintaining that sparkling smile -- it's a matter of your best friend's good health!



Photos of dog before and after Stage 2 dental procedure.