

## Pets have teeth, too!

by Stephanie Webb, DVM and  
Debbie Simpson

Imagine what would happen if you didn't brush your teeth on a regular basis. You would develop gingivitis, cavities, bad breath, and dental disease. Dental disease is insidious and the disease process and end result is the same in a pet's mouth. Therefore, regular dental care is just as important for your pet as it is for you.

Did you know that periodontal disease is the most common infectious disease in both cats and dogs? In fact, about 85% of adult pets have some form of periodontal disease. If left untreated, infection in the mouth will cause pain, bad breath & tooth loss. In addition, this infection can spread harmful bacteria to the bloodstream and cause severe heart, liver, lung and kidney problems. A mere one milligram of plaque contains over 1 trillion bacteria. Impressive, huh?

*How do you know if your pet has periodontal disease?* There are several symptoms that are easily recognizable: 1) bad breath – one of the first signs of periodontal disease; 2) red or swollen gums; 3) yellow-brown crust near the gum line; 4) loose or missing teeth; 5) discomfort when mouth or gums are touched; or 6) possible decrease in appetite or weight loss due to difficulty chewing.

To check your pet for these signs or symptoms, you can simply "flip the lip". Gently lift your pet's lip to expose the teeth and gum line. A healthy mouth will not only improve your pet's breath, but also prolong your pet's life.

There are several methods of keeping your pet's teeth clean: 1) Regular dental check-ups & cleanings at your veterinarian's office. 2) Brushing – daily tooth brushing is the best at-home method. 3) Oral hygiene chews – these promote chewing and the better brands have a dual-enzyme system to control plaque and help to eliminate bacteria buildup. Your veterinarian can recommend the most suitable product for your pet. 4) Oral hygiene rinses and gels – gels and rinses are typically used following a professional dental cleaning by your veterinarian, but they're also easy to use at home. 5) A new dental vaccine has recently been introduced to the veterinary market which will aid in the prevention of canine periodontitis when used as part of a complete dental care program.

Your veterinarian will recommend the most appropriate treatment for your beloved pet. *What can we learn from all of this?* Prevention and treatment of dental disease will not only make your beloved pet more smoochable, it will improve your pet's quality of life and longevity.

*Stephanie Webb, DVM has been an associate at Canyon Animal Clinic for 6 years. Debbie Simpson is Hospital Administrator. Jeff Quinn, DVM, has been a Veterinarian in Canyon Lake for 32 years. For more information, call 964-3696.*



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