

February is National Pet Dental Health Month!

This month, we're taking the opportunity to answer common questions about dental healthcare for your pets!

Why does my pet need dental care?

Dental care for pets is just as important as it is for humans. Because plaque can develop under the gum line, professional cleanings are required to treat it. Plaque, when left untreated, can build up and harden into tartar, which can develop into more severe health issues. By the time most pets reach the age of three, they likely have some form of dental disease. One of the most common issues seen in pets is periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease starts when plaque hardens into tartar and causes an infection in the mouth. This infection can impact the gums, weaken the jawbone, and even cause teeth to fall out. In extreme cases, dental disease can lead to more serious problems in the liver, kidneys, and heart.

What are the symptoms of dental disease in pets?

To prevent and help treat dental disease, monitor your pets for these symptoms:

- Yellow or brown buildup (tartar) on the teeth
- Red, swollen, or bleeding gums
- Bad breath
- Excessive drooling
- Changes in eating or chewing habits
- Pawing at the face
- Loose teeth
- Depression

If you notice these symptoms in your pet, make an appointment with us to start treatment. Regular dental cleanings will help prevent dental disease from forming in the first place.

What does pet dental work consist of?

Pet dental work is very similar to human dental work. It consists of cleaning, polishing, filings, extractions and repairing the damage. When you book a dental appointment, your doctor will examine your pet's mouth, teeth, and jaw. X-Rays are often used to help your Veterinarian understand what is happening below the gum line.

Teeth cleanings start with a physical exam to assess your pet's overall health. Once we ensure it is safe to do so, we will put your pet under anesthesia to guarantee a safe and painless cleaning. Your doctor will scrape the tartar off your pet's teeth, clean above & under the gum line and in between each tooth. The final step is to wash the gums to delay tartar buildup.

If your pet already suffers from dental disease, extractions and advanced procedures may be required. These procedures are only recommended when they are necessary for the well-being of your pet. Extractions are usually recommended when your Veterinarian identifies a broken or infected tooth. Before any procedure, we will discuss what this procedure means for your pet going forward and give you instructions on how to properly care for them while they are healing.

Why do pets need to go under anesthesia when getting X-Rays and Dental Procedures?

Because damage often occurs below the gum line, X-Rays are often required to see the whole picture. Our pets don't understand what X-Rays are or why they need to stay still while the X-Rays are being taken. When an animal is under anesthesia, they are laying still, allowing your vet to get a clear picture of what is happening inside your pet's mouth.

It is also important for pets to stay still during extractions, procedures and cleanings. Pets don't understand that these things are being done for their benefit. Instead, they feel the discomfort of an unfamiliar experience. Keeping pets still during dental exams helps reduce the pain for your pets and the doctor working with them. Keeping pets still prevents them from biting down on the equipment or the hand that is working in their teeth. Putting your pet under anesthesia protects both your pet and the doctor working on them while limiting any pain felt.

Anesthesia has become much safer in recent years. Our team will conduct a wellness exam and bloodwork to ensure your pet is well enough to be put under. Most pets can go home the same day as their dental appointment but may be drowsy for several hours afterward.

How can I help take care of my pets' teeth at home?

While your pets can't brush their teeth twice a day, there are things you can do at home to help them maintain a healthy mouth. Regularly brushing your pet's teeth and providing them with teeth cleaning treats can help to prevent dental disease. Make sure to check for size or weight recommendations on hard toys and bones to help prevent damaging your pet's teeth.

Call us if you have any additional questions about your pet's dental health! Regular oral exams and dental procedures coupled with at home care is the best way to prevent disease and damage to your pet's mouth, teeth, and jaw. Book an appointment with us today!