

Dental disease causes pain, discomfort, and allows bacteria to enter the blood stream leading to organ disease. Yet oral hygiene is one of the most overlooked areas of medical care for dogs and cats. Consistent dental care genuinely makes your pet feel better and has a direct impact on long term quality of life. Dental disease is treatable and preventable, but your pet cannot tell you how it feels. It is up to all of us to address this problem. Good dental care revolves around the control of bacteria under the gum line where it is not visible.

Here are some nice normal teeth



Here are some teeth with advanced periodontal



The key term that our discussion centers on is Periodontal Disease. The following is a concise definition= **Periodontal disease: A bacterial infection that destroys the attachment fibers and supporting bone that hold the teeth in the mouth. Left untreated, these diseases can lead to tooth loss. The main cause of periodontal disease is bacterial plaque, a sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on teeth.**

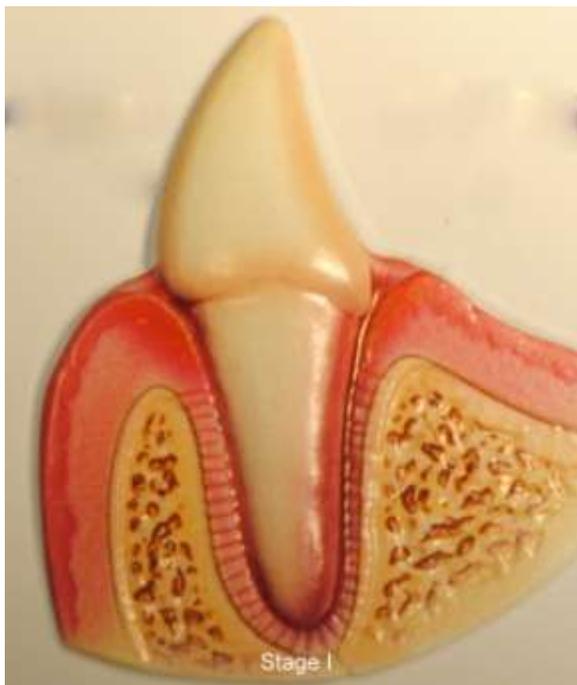
Symptoms

Symptoms can range from subtle to severe. Bad breath is a common sign. Difficulty eating, drooling, gingivitis, plaque formation, and gum recession are visible symptoms. Pain is more variable, some pets are very sensitive while others are very stoic. You can't assume they are fine just because they don't act painful.

The important point to remember is the fact that once you notice any of these symptoms, your pet's dental disease is already causing discomfort or pain, and even affecting other body organs. It is important for you to be aware of the existence of this problem and hopefully deal with it proactively.

Stage I

Bacteria cause an invisible plaque on the teeth. Over time the bacteria react with minerals and debris forming tartar. The body's first line of defense against plaque and tartar are the gingiva. If the gingiva are red and swollen (gingivitis) it usually means the body is fighting bacteria. Visibly, if gingivitis and/ or plaque are present, then it is important to treat now before the problem progresses to more advanced periodontal disease. If treated now, the condition is reversible - as periodontal disease progresses it becomes more difficult to reverse.



Stage II

As periodontal disease progresses, then the gum becomes more inflamed and plaque thickens. The underlying gum pulls away from the tooth.



Stage III

With further progression of periodontal disease the pocket of bacteria under the gum line is significantly weakening the periodontal ligament and weakening the surrounding bone.



Stage IV

Periodontal disease eventually progresses to stage IV. Ulcerated gums, gum recession, pus along the gum line, and severe tartar can be seen. What can't be seen is the lysis of surrounding bone, bacteria at the tooth root apex, and bacteria spreading to internal organs via the bloodstream.



Cats are prone to "carries" which are essentially cavities (holes in the enamel and dentin).



How Does Q Street Animal Hospital Deal With Dental Disease???

Yearly Exams We recommend and send out reminders for every pet to have yearly exams. During yearly exams we do a thorough physical examination including evaluating the health of the mouth. At this time we can advise you whether a dental is warranted and discuss preventative dental care.

We also evaluate your pet's overall health. If a dental is needed, anesthesia will be necessary and knowing the pet's overall health is extremely important. The thought of anesthesia can be alarming to people. It is normal to have concerns about anesthesia, and we have many protocols in place to ensure safety. However the single most important way to ensure anesthetic safety is to know the pet's overall health and plan accordingly. In some cases a dental is not the highest priority. In many cases we will recommend blood work to help us evaluate your pets health and safety for anesthesia.

Scheduling We do require that a regular exam has been done within the year. As noted above, this is important in allowing us to evaluate your pet's overall health and prioritize what the pet's needs truly are. If an exam has been done within the year, then you can schedule a dental. Currently, we do anesthetic procedures on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Exceptions can sometimes be made. Over the phone, our customer service specialist will 1) schedule a day for you to come in, 2) let you know to withhold food after 9 pm the night before, 3) arrive at approximately 7:30 am, 4) you can expect to be able to pick up your pet between 3:30 and 5:00 pm.

Appointment Day When you come in, we will do our best to keep your wait as short as possible. One of our technicians will go into an exam room with you and go through a short check list and consent form with you. If blood work has not already been done, they will recommend that. At all points in the process we welcome questions and discussion. We want you and your pet to feel comfortable.

Hospital Procedures Once a technician has checked your pet in. They will be placed in a kennel with a soft blanket or towel to lay on. Their chart will be organized and reviewed by a Doctor. The Doctor will then do a brief physical exam double checking the pet's overall health and evaluating any risk factors for anesthesia.

Anesthesia Your pet is then given a premedication to help him/her relax and smooth out the anesthetic process. When we are ready we will place an intravenous catheter and induce anesthesia with an intravenous anesthetic agent. Once the patient is induced we place an endotracheal tube and provide gas anesthesia. We monitor the patient closely at this point and get them to a suitable plane of anesthesia to allow us to proceed with the dental.



We do anesthetic procedures on a regular basis and feel comfortable doing them. None-the-less we have a healthy respect for it. We have many protocols in place to ensure the safety of your pet. Our anesthetic machines are regularly inspected and calibrated. The anesthetic drugs are safe, effective, and the dosing protocols are reviewed by a board certified anesthesiologist. Our staff is trained to carefully monitor anesthesia. We have multiple anesthetic monitoring devices that we use depending on the needs of the patient. Our own pet's receive the exact same protocols.

Professional Cleaning The first task is to do a thorough oral exam. This can only be done when a pet is sedated / anesthetized. This includes a visual exam, physically feeling the tooth to check for laxity, and probing the gum line to check for deep pockets. Then we start cleaning the teeth with our scaler. A scaler is an instrument that literally vibrates the tartar off the teeth. It continually sprays water to minimize heat buildup. Below is a picture of the scaler hand piece as well as the drill, polisher, and water/ air piece.



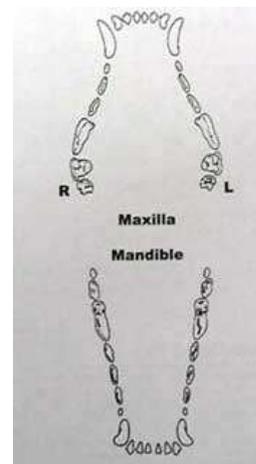
Digital Radiographs It is sometimes necessary to radiograph a tooth's root to assess their viability. If there is evidence of an abscess or significant surrounding bone loss, then it is best to extract the tooth. The radiographs are also important for making sure that no pieces of a root are left behind after extracting a tooth.

Here is Laura getting ready to take a dental radiograph of Cleo's teeth.



This is an example of a dental radiograph.

Once we are done with the dental we record ("chart") our findings and extractions.



Preventative Care

There are numerous products to help with dental care. It is important to be realistic with your expectations with these products. A professional cleaning has a very profound ability to completely clean the teeth. Brushing the teeth three times a week can also dramatically control plaque formation - brushing disrupts bacteria before they can form a hard plaque if done approximately every 3 days. Greenies and T/D Hills Diet help scrape/clean the teeth while chewing. Mouth washes enzymatically reduce bacteria.



Benefits of Dental Care = eliminates pain associated with gum inflammation, root abscesses, and surrounding bone damage. Also eliminates potential source of bacteria entering the bloodstream that can lead to internal organ disease. Definitely having a direct impact on your pets immediate comfort level and quality of life. Definitely having a direct impact on your pets long-term health and longevity. Remember, dental disease is treatable and preventable. It is up to you as owners and us, as your pet care providers, to be proactive! With each exam we will check and discuss your pets oral health, be sure to ask us lots of questions - that is what we are here for.

With healthy teeth, your pet can . . .

Eat, Drink, and be Merry with your friends (Lydia, Reuben, and Arlie)

