

Dogs and cats have two sets of teeth during their lifetime a deciduous baby tooth set and their adult teeth which erupt around 6 months of age. Regular dental care is vital to maintain teeth and gums – without it 70% of pets will show signs of disease by the age of 5. Dental disease is associated with the build up of a thin film of bacteria on the teeth – plaque. If not removed calcium and food particles combine with the plaque to form hard calculus (also known as tartar). This accumulation irritates the gums causing them to become red and inflamed- gingivitis, eventually leading to a pocket formation which traps food debris and leads to breakdown of the tooth attachments as well as the bony socket. The gums will then recede and infection will occur, leading to loose teeth and a painful mouth.

The signs of dental disease are gingivitis (gum inflammation), bad breath, loss of appetite mouth pain loosening and loss of the teeth and in severe cases, when bacteria from diseased teeth enters the blood stream, heart, liver and kidney failure.

**Dental Care stage 1** - is a thorough examination – included free of charge in the annual booster health check, Pet Care Plan checks, and nurse clinic checks.

**Dental Care Stage 2** - If necessary your pet's teeth will be **cleaned and polished** under general anaesthesia while those beyond saving will be extracted. With older animals we may recommend a blood profile to make sure your pet's health status is precisely known. Ultrasonic scaling quickly removes plaque and tartar – the tip of the machine vibrates 30,000 times per second and the process is completed by mechanical polishing, which leaves the tooth surface smooth so preventing re-attachment of plaque. It may be necessary to x ray the teeth just like at the dentist to show up diseased roots.

**Dental Care Stage 3 Homecare** – We recommend daily **brushing** which is the best way to remove plaque from under the gum line. Use a pet toothpaste which contains enzymes and mild abrasives to break down plaque – the paste is spread around by the saliva and sticks to the teeth ensuring long action. It is best to aim to spend about 1 minute daily on each side of the pet's mouth. Human toothpastes, are not designed to be swallowed and may cause upset stomachs in pets. It is a good idea to get puppies and kittens used to brushing (finger brushes are particularly useful). Although daily brushing is the best method to prevent dental disease in pets some animals are difficult to brush so alternatives may be necessary.

- 1) Use **Dental diets** - These diets can replace all or part of your pet's normal food, they contain natural vegetable fibres that work like a toothbrush to 'wipe' the teeth clean, during normal chewing. They contain less of the minerals associated with plaque (calcium/phosphorus) and less protein (the fuel source of mouth bacteria) but are complete, providing all the essential nutrients for healthy life.
- 2) Use **Dental chews** these are abrasive and fun for the pet to chew. Dental toys eg Kong are particularly useful in dogs which otherwise chew furniture  
NORMAL BONES ARE NOT RECOMMENDED
- 3) Use **oral hygiene rinse** applied directly to the mouth – this controls plaque forming bacteria
- 4) Use a daily **drinking water additive** eg Vet Aquadent - this may be particularly useful for cats – this controls plaque bacteria and reduces bad breath

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