

DENTAL DISEASE IN PETS



Dogs and cats require routine dental care and establishing a good dental care routine at home is very important for our pets, just like humans. **Dogs and cats that receive dental care on average live approximately 10-20% longer.** Much like people, poor dental hygiene can lead to secondary insults within the body such as liver, kidney, heart and/or lung infections from the millions of bacteria that can enter the bloodstream. In addition, dental disease in pets can lead to severe pain which jeopardizes their quality of life. This is why **Rootstown Veterinary Hospital highly recommends yearly oral examinations** to evaluate the extent of disease, give next steps to treat

underlying issues, and discuss preventative care measures to take to promote a healthy mouth in our pets.

WHAT CAUSES PERIODONTAL DISEASE (DENTAL DISEASE)?

Dental disease starts when soft plaque starts to build up on the teeth over time which leads to irritation/inflammation of the gumline, otherwise known as gingivitis. Gingivitis then leads to further damage of the underlying tissues and bone loss, i.e. periodontal disease. Advanced disease leads to tooth loss, abscessed teeth, severe gum infections, oral ulcers, resorptive lesions (especially cats), weight loss, and/or systemic organ damage.

DENTAL PROCEDURE FROM START TO FINISH

The dental procedure starts with a thorough oral examination, typically at your pet's yearly examination. This is the time for your veterinarian to estimate the level of disease and discuss a treatment plan. This may include an estimate for a dental procedure if warranted.

General anesthesia is required to perform any dental procedure in our pets including a more thorough oral examination, dental radiographs and scaling and polishing of the teeth. There are different anesthesia protocols for different patient's needs and potential other co-morbidities. Your veterinarian will determine what the best protocol will be based on your pet's history, extent of disease, co-morbidities, age, etc. Additionally, **we highly recommend considering baseline bloodwork prior to any anesthetic event** to give more insight as to the best anesthetic protocol.

Once anesthetized, a thorough oral examination is performed to look for abnormalities such as level of periodontal disease, broken teeth, missing teeth, ulcerations, growths, etc. Each dental procedure includes full mouth dental radiographs (x-rays) to examine what's beneath the surface, as we are unable to physically visualize the roots of each tooth. Sometimes externally a tooth appears to be undiseased, but on radiographs, the root(s) are diseased requiring intervention.

After probing each aspect of all teeth and looking at dental radiographs, your veterinarian will determine which teeth need to be extracted. More advanced dental procedures, such as root canals or tooth-saving options, could potentially be pursued with a board-certified veterinary dentist. However, any diseased tooth must be addressed in some way, otherwise this would be a disservice to your pet's health and in many cases, extraction is the only viable option.

****We do not typically call during dental procedures unless the amount of the estimate will be going above the dollar amount expected. This helps to decrease unnecessary anesthetic time and focus on good quality medical practices (i.e. extracting all non-viable teeth).****

Extraction of any diseased teeth involves local anesthetic to numb areas of the mouth, sectioning with a high-powered drill, and suturing the gum tissue over the extraction sites. Oral tissues heal relatively quickly, usually within about 5 days. Following extractions, the remainder of the teeth are scaled to clean all remaining tartar above and below the gumline, polished to smooth out scratches, and rinsed with an antibacterial solution to help delay plaque build-up.



DENTAL CARE AND PREVENTATIVE MEASURES FROM HOME

All of us know the importance of brushing and flossing our teeth at home and the same goes for our pets. Below are some recommendations for at-home dental care to consider:

1. **Start early!** If you have a puppy or kitten, we recommend starting to integrate a dental cleaning routine now so they become comfortable young.
2. **Teeth brushing** is the most effective preventative measure
 - a. There are specific toothbrushes and toothpaste for dogs/cats
 - b. If you are trying to do everything but brush, it would be like flossing or using mouth wash without actually brushing your teeth (it will only get you so far!).
 - c. At minimum, recommend brushing at least twice weekly
3. **Tartar-prevention treats and chews**
 - a. Look for products that have a VOHC seal – have been clinically proven to work
 - b. Be careful with adding additional calories into your pet's diet, especially if already overweight. If you need help calculating calories for your pet, please ask your veterinarian.
4. **Water additives**
 - a. Look for products that have a VOHC seal - have been clinically proven to work
 - b. These can aid in reducing bacterial load in the mouth that contribute to plaque
5. **Tartar control pet food**
 - a. There are specific foods available that can help reduce plaque and tartar build-up but still provide a healthy and balanced diet.
 - b. Prescription diets would be the most effective such as Hill's t/d, Purina DH, or Royal Canin DH
6. The following links below are helpful resources regarding your pet's dental care
 - a. **VOHC approved products list** link: <https://vohc.org/accepted-products/>
 - b. Dental Home Care: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQb8C9HKQUU>
 - c. Benefits & Risks of Dental Cleaning in Cats: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U75BPDMnI0A>
 - d. Periodontal Disease: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co4FsEO55j4>
 - e. How to brush your dog's teeth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nobK1Ughst8>



Resources

1. <https://bestfriendsvet.com/>
2. AAHA Pet Health Brochure series