

Dental Care for Cats

What is Dental Disease?

Kittens have 26 teeth, while adult cats have 30. If each tooth can be considered a patient, that equates to a lot of dental care! Periodontal disease is considered the most prevalent disease in cats three years of age and older. The periodontium is comprised largely by the "unseen" portions of the teeth which lie below the gum line, in addition to the gums. Therefore, detection and assessment of periodontal disease can be subtle.

Dental disease begins when bacteria colonize the mouth and a plaque biofilm is formed. Over time, this biofilm mineralizes, and calcifies into tartar. The bacterial population accumulates, which leads to inflammation and results in periodontal disease. Additional factors such as misaligned teeth, systemic disease, nutrition, and genetics may also contribute to disease.

There are four stages of periodontal disease, with stage one being the most minimal and progressing through to stage four. Stage one is the only stage that is considered reversible, through the use of professional and home dental healthcare. This is the reason that the recommended time to begin professional dental evaluations and cleanings is within the first or second year of a cat's life. Professional dental evaluation should be performed thereafter every 6-12 months, and will involve a general examination while the cat is awake, but will also require anesthesia to allow for complete examination. This anesthetized examination will include dental charting, periodontal probing, and intraoral x-rays. Dental procedures (such as teeth scaling and polishing, or surgical extractions of diseased teeth) are often performed at the same time as the anesthetized examination. More frequent dental examinations may be required for patients with severe dental disease; your veterinarian can help to guide you in this process.

In addition to periodontal disease, cats can also develop other dental diseases, including tooth resorption (destruction of the tooth starting at the root of the tooth & working up to the crown, this is a very common tooth disease in cats) stomatitis (widespread inflammation of the mouth), and fractured teeth.

What to Look for?

Signs of dental pathology can include bad breath, dropping food or chewing only on one side of the mouth, facial swellings or draining wounds, bleeding or discharge from the mouth or nose, sneezing, pawing at the mouth, tooth grinding, or discolored teeth. Often there are no obvious signs of dental disease. Most cats with dental disease still eat without a noticeable change in appetite! Discuss your cat's teeth at their routine preventive care veterinary visit.

If you are suspicious of dental disease, an examination by a licensed veterinary professional is indicated.

Home Care

The gold standard for preventative dental homecare is tooth brushing. Additionally, a variety of dental prescription and non-prescription diets, treats and toys, along with oral rinses, gels, sprays and water additives have been developed. The Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) provides a list of the specific products which meet certain standards for the retardation of plaque and calculus, and can be found on their website (see below). Home care is not sufficient once dental disease has progressed past stage one -- only professional dental therapy can effectively treat the more severe stages of dental disease.

**** Before starting any new dental treats, food, toothpaste, water additives or sprays, consult your** veterinarian. Some products have been found to contain Xylitol which very toxic to animals**