



# DENTAL

Dental and oral care for your pet...at home & at the vet!

## Professional Dental Cleaning for your pet

Professional dental cleaning is often indicated when periodontal disease is present.

Our own teeth are scaled by a dentist or hygienist - we sit in the chair and open our mouth when requested, letting the professional do their work.

Whilst the principles of good oral hygiene and dental health are the same for dogs and cats as for people, there are some significant differences.

We understand why the procedure is important, and we typically do not need sedation or restraint.

We also seek dental care before the disease becomes very advanced. This is not true for our pets.

Another important difference between human and veterinary dental practice is that we tell the dentist when there is discomfort; to ensure that nothing is missed in dogs or cats, our patients require a thorough oral examination as part of a dental scaling procedure. Your veterinary dentist may need to perform dental radiographs to adequately assess the health of the teeth.

Professional dental cleaning includes scaling and other steps described here.



## The dental procedure

Every professional dental cleaning starts with a review of the patient's general health and any previous dental history. For a thorough, safe dental cleaning in veterinary patients, anaesthesia is essential, as this permits a comprehensive assessment of the tissues, allows dental radiographs to be taken when indicated, followed by the cleaning (scaling and polishing procedure) above and below the gum-line. "Non-anaesthetic or Anaesthesia-free dental cleaning" is not recommended by the American Veterinary Dental Association, or any specialist veterinary dentists.

If the dental disease is limited to accumulation of plaque and dental tartar with gingivitis or only mild periodontitis (bone loss around the tooth), professional dental cleaning is indicated.

Professional dental cleaning removes dental plaque and tartar that cause periodontal disease. The dental deposits are removed by power (ultrasonic) and hand dental scalers. Following scaling, the teeth are polished to remove residual plaque and to smooth the tooth surface (which delays deposition of plaque and tartar subsequently). The mouth is rinsed to remove debris prior to a final inspection.

The pet owner will be provided with recommendations for daily home oral hygiene specific for dogs or cats, and a recommendation made for a follow-up examination.

## How will my pet eat after extractions?

For the initial post-operative period, your pet will have dissolvable stitches and be a little sore. It is important they only eat soft food, to avoid dislodging the stitch line. Mouths generally heal very rapidly and after a week they can usually go back to dry food. Once the teeth are extracted the socket fills with bone and the gumline which was once inflamed and infected, heals. This means that even when they chew food the gum will be hard enough to crunch the food and the underlying jaw is healthy.

With diseased teeth, the pets often don't chew their food, and avoid anything touching the tooth at all costs – they use one side (the healthy side) of their mouths to chew, they lick up food, or swallow dry kibble whole.

## How do I avoid my pet having extractions?

- Use many different products to keep your pet's mouths healthy – encourage chew toys, dental sticks, and specialist dental foods.
- Use a water additive that is proven to reduce plaque and is approved by veterinary dentists (eg **HealthyMouth**™)
- Brush their teeth as often as you can (daily is best.)
- Keep hair trimmed around the face for long hair breeds.
- Get regular professional dental cleaning – every 6 -12 months depending on the build-up.

All these steps will help avoid interventional dental procedures and increase your pet's dental health, and that means their overall health.

## Will my pet have extractions?

Often by the time we as veterinarians see pets for dental procedures, their periodontal disease is quite advanced. If you consider that most people brush their teeth twice daily and go to the dentist or hygienist every 6 months for an advanced cleaning, when we see pets they have usually had none of the above treatments in the last 12 months! Is it any surprise they have periodontal disease? Sure, they don't drink Coke, smoke or eat sweets, but the leading cause of tooth problems in both humans and animals is from plaque – and only regular brushing removes it.

If your pet has significant loss of the ligament that holds the tooth in the jaw, then this will create a nice pocket where bacteria can thrive, close to the tooth root and hidden in the bony socket. If the tooth is not removed (as the ligament cannot be replaced), then within hours of cleaning the infection will start up again. It is negligent for a veterinary professional to leave an animal's mouth in this state.

If your pet has a resorptive lesion (or dental cary) then the tooth pulp and root is exposed to plaque. A large painful tooth root abscess can develop and that tooth hurts and must be extracted.

If the gumline has receded so much that the tooth root is exposed, and there is bony loss in the jaw, then the tooth must also be extracted as it is painful and the disease process cannot be reversed. Brushing a tooth in this condition will hurt and you will be unable to keep the other teeth healthy. It is very important that each tooth is inspected under an anaesthetic and further diagnostics such as a radiograph will determine which teeth need to be extracted. It is not possible to examine a mouth in a conscious animal and tell you that there will be no extractions. Often there may be severe disease lurking below the gum line.

No-one likes extracting teeth unnecessarily, and every tooth and case is assessed on an individual basis. Sometimes with active therapy and committed home care we can 'save' early diseased teeth. Prevention is better than cure – and regular dental 'prophies' every 6 – 12 months to remove build-up of plaque and tartar and treat gingivitis before it becomes advanced, will save many many teeth, and improve your pet's health.

Dental home care is the cornerstone of any treatment and we can assist you with this.

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