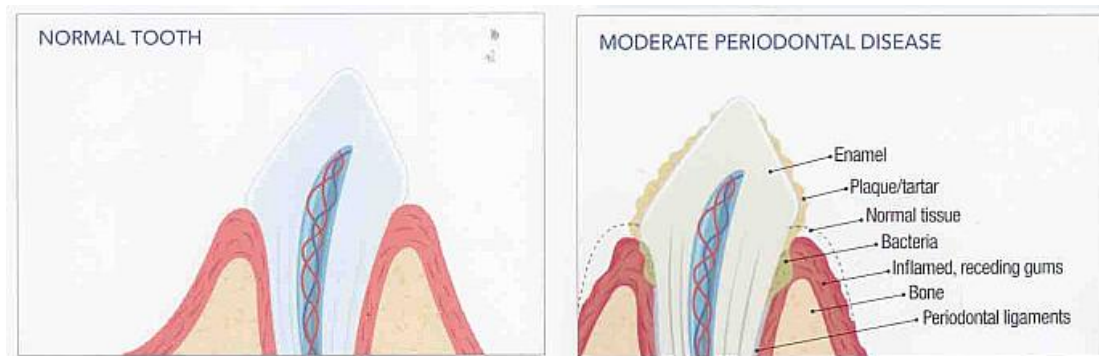


Dental Health in Dogs and Cats



Severe tartar buildup and periodontal disease in a small dog

Dental disease occurs in approximately 90% of our pet population, yet is largely undiagnosed and untreated. The most common form of dental problems in dogs and cats over 3 years is periodontal disease (disease around the tooth). We're all familiar with plaque and brush our own teeth regularly to control it. In our furry friends, periodontal disease also starts with plaque (a coating of salivary protein and bacteria). Gingivitis is inflammation of the gums and follows the development of plaque. If the plaque is allowed to remain it can harden to form calculus (tartar), which is a very common problem in animals that we see. The progressing inflammation and calculus build up at the bottom of the tooth crown pushes the gum away and weakens the attachments of the tooth to the bone resulting in tooth loosening. Also food material, hair and bacteria can sometimes become impacted between the tooth and gum.



Source: Hill's Pet Nutrition Dental Handout

Pet carers are often unaware of a problem, however, some signs of dental disease in pets include:

- Bad breath
- Drooling and frequent licking
- Changed eating behaviour
- Facial swellings, rubbing and pawing at face or jaw
- Discolouration and build up of material on teeth.

Dental disease in pets can have some serious consequences for our companion's overall health and wellbeing. Chronic pain and discomfort can be just the tip of the iceberg and many of our furry mates are expert at hiding these signs. Other problems associated with oral health include tooth loss, anorexia, abscesses and bone weakening. Infections associated with periodontal disease can become the focus for more generalised problems. In particular bacteria can enter the blood stream and

colonise the heart valves leading to a condition called endocarditis which is difficult to treat and can lead to heart failure. Blood poisoning or septicaemia is also possible.

As with people, prevention is the best cure and early diagnosis and treatment are critical. Dental disease is highly preventable and steps can be taken early in your pet's life to ensure a healthy mouth for as long as possible. Daily tooth brushing to remove plaque build up on teeth is very effective and pet toothpastes in poultry and beef flavours are available. It should be noted that human toothpaste should not be used as most pets do not like the minty flavour and foaming agents in human toothpaste may cause stomach upsets if swallowed.

Chew toys and feeding special diets such as Hill's T/D (teeth diet) can also reduce plaque accumulation. Water additives can also be used to help reduced bacterial populations in the mouth. However these measures work best preventatively and once dental disease is advanced professional cleaning and extraction of diseased teeth by a veterinarian with the pet under a general anaesthetic may be required. For further information regarding prevention of dental disease or advice regarding professional dentals please contact your veterinarian.