

Fact Sheet **D05**



Dental care for your dog



Oral health

Periodontal (gum) disease is one of the most common conditions seen by veterinary surgeons today. The problems begin when plaque and tartar are allowed to build up on your dog's teeth.

Plaque harbours the bacteria which can infect gum tissue and the roots of teeth, causing disease and tooth loss. The bacteria can also enter the blood stream and may cause damage to internal organs. Recent studies have shown that certain heart, liver and kidney diseases may be associated with these bacteria.

What are the signs of poor oral health?

- Persistent bad breath.
- Sensitivity around mouth.
- Loss of appetite.
- Difficulty eating and chewing food.
- Pawing at mouth.
- Loose or missing teeth.
- Bleeding, inflamed or receding gums.
- Tartar (creamy-brown hard material on teeth).

Caring for your dog's teeth

The first step in promoting oral health is to have your dog thoroughly examined by a veterinary surgeon. It may be necessary for your dog's teeth to be cleaned above and below the gum-line. This simple cleaning procedure requires your dog to be anaesthetised. Recent advancements in anaesthetic techniques and materials have greatly reduced the risks previously associated with this procedure. It is then recommended that an oral hygiene programme be started at home.



This involves regular tooth brushing which is the most effective way of preventing future build up of plaque. Special toothbrushes and toothpastes designed for dogs are available. Dental products such as pet toothpastes are available at all of our surgeries.

These toothpastes appeal to dogs and do not need to be rinsed. Human toothpastes or baking soda should not be used as they contain ingredients which should not be swallowed.

Pet toothbrushes such as the finger brush or dual-ended brush are ultra soft and are shaped to fit your dog's mouth and teeth. When brushing is not practical, an antibacterial oral rinse or gel may be recommended. These products are specially made for pets and with daily use can help to slow the build-up of dental plaque.

How to brush your dog's teeth

Brushing your dog's teeth is easy and does not take much time.

The first step is to pick a time when both you and your dog are relaxed. For the first few days simply hold your dog, as you would normally do when you are petting him/her. Gently stroke the outside of the cheeks with your finger for a minute or two. After each session, reward your dog with an appropriate treat and lots of praise. For the next few days - after your dog has become comfortable with this activity - place a small amount of the toothpaste on your finger and let your dog sample the flavour. Next, introduce your dog to an animal toothbrush or finger brush.



Place a small amount of toothpaste on the brush and gently raise your dog's upper lip and place the brush against an upper tooth. With a slow circular motion, gently brush only that tooth and the adjoining gum-line. Each day gradually increase the number of teeth brushed but go slowly, do not continue beyond your dog's point of comfort. Build up to approximately 30 seconds of brushing per side.

After each session reward your dog with a treat and lots of praise. Preferably, brushing should be done daily, but if this is not suitable then a couple of times a week should suffice.

Diet

Diet can be a major factor in the development of plaque and tartar. Soft or sticky foods may contribute to plaque build up and subsequent periodontal disease.

Therefore, dry foods, biscuits and newly formulated abrasive diets are recommended, as they can be helpful in removing plaque from above the gum-line.

Diets such as Hills t/d and chews are recommended as they are good for the days when you do not manage to brush your pet's teeth. Only tooth brushing, however, can remove plaque and food debris beneath the gum-line - this is where the disease causing bacteria flourish, resulting in irritation, inflammation and infection.

For further information please ask at reception.