



DENTAL HYGIENE AT CHESTNUT VETS

Gum disease is one of the most common diseases in dogs and cats. Gum inflammation, or gingivitis, is caused by the build up of a film of plaque on the teeth. Plaque is made up of saliva, food and bacteria which sit on the surface of the teeth – if teeth are not kept clean, then plaque can develop into hard deposits called tartar which can eventually cover the whole tooth.

Dogs and cats have teeth very similar to our own, and therefore are susceptible to many of the same oral problems that we can suffer from. Plaque and tartar can result in:

- Gum redness, inflammation and infections
- Tooth root infections
- Pain and discomfort
- Reduced appetite
- Bleeding from the gums, with the risk of toxins entering the blood stream

Dogs and cats are very good at hiding the early signs of tooth disease and pain, so in the early stages you may not be aware that your pet is suffering. Regular veterinary check ups are the best way to catch problems before they arise. Once your pet's condition has progressed, you may see signs of pain at home such as a reluctance to eat or to play with toys, or possibly notice your pet having bad breath. Dogs, and particularly cats, may also drool when they have tooth disease.

Depending on the nature and severity of your pet's gum or tooth disease, your vet may recommend that your pet receives treatment at the practice, or may suggest that at this stage, preventative treatment at home is all that is necessary.

In the practice, your pet would undergo a general anaesthetic to allow the veterinary surgeon to have a better examination of your pet's mouth, including using a small implement to probe under the gum line to assess the health of your pet's teeth and grade any degree of gum recession. Your vet will then make a decision as to whether any teeth require removal – it is better to remove a diseased tooth or one that is coming loose than to leave it behind. Some diseased teeth have deep roots, and some even have two roots but maybe only one part that is diseased. Such teeth are more challenging to extract but for such cases we are able to offer 'open extraction' techniques using drills and equipment which make the procedure quicker and less traumatic for your pet, resulting in a quicker healing time. It is only during the procedure that your vet will be able to decide on whether your pet requires any tooth extractions and what method of extraction would be most appropriate. All patients receiving dental work under an anaesthetic also receive a full scale and polish of all their remaining teeth – scaling removes any plaque and tartar and polishing removes scratches from the tooth's surface which makes it harder for plaque to build up again.

At Chestnuts we appreciate the importance of being able to provide you with an estimate prior to elective procedures such as dental work. For this reason we do not charge any more for dental work regardless of the number of extracted teeth and methods of extraction that your pet may require whilst under the anaesthetic. Please speak to your vet for more information regarding our price estimates for dental work. Dogs and cats recover quickly from dental work, although we



suggest a soft diet whilst the gums are healing, the majority of pets can return to their normal diet within a week or two, even if they have had multiple teeth removed.

Preventative dental hygiene is crucial to your pet's wellbeing. Both our veterinary surgeons and nurses are extremely experienced in oral hygiene and dental matters, and would be more than happy to discuss any element of preventative care with you. The more teeth cleaning and preventative measures you can take, the less chance there is of your pet requiring further dental treatment in the future. Even if your pet has had a scale and polish, it is important that you continue preventative treatment at home as plaque and tartar can build up again quickly.

There are a number of products available to buy at your practice, to encourage good oral hygiene.

Brushing your pet's teeth

Human toothpaste should not be used on dogs and cats – they can be toxic to animals and most do not like the taste. Specific veterinary toothpastes are available in a variety of tasty flavours e.g. poultry or beef and are safe if your pet swallows some of it. These toothpastes are designed for animals and contain enzymes that help dissolve plaque effectively e.g. **Logic Oral Hygiene Gel and Virbac Enzymatic Toothpaste.**

Toothbrushes for animals often have softer bristles, and long handles for ease of use. An alternative to a toothbrush is a thimble shaped finger brush.

How to brush your pets teeth.

- Praise is essential to allow your pet to enjoy the experience and to look forward to the next time.
- Firstly allow your pet to enjoy the taste of the toothpaste. Apply it to your finger, toys or your cats paw. This should be repeated daily for a week.
- The next step is to get your pet used to their mouth being handled. Always take care when putting your fingers in and around your pet's mouth. Build up the process by using your finger, working around the mouth and gradually increase the number of teeth you touch. The finger brush can be introduced. Patience is needed at this stage and can take up to a month for your pet to adjust to the brushing sensation.
- When introducing the toothbrush, wet it and apply the toothpaste. A top tip is to push the paste into the bristles to prevent it falling off in the process. Firstly just brush a few teeth and again gradually increase the number of teeth over a period of time.
- You do not need to open your pet's mouth to brush their teeth, just lift the lip up with one hand and brush with the other. Finding a comfortable routine for you and your pet will make the experience more enjoyable for you both.
- It is ideal to set a routine for tooth brushing, either after you've brushed your own teeth or after your pet's last meal of the day.

Other products are available to accompany tooth brushing or to be used instead if your pet is less tolerant.

- **Plaque Off** is a seaweed-based product that can be placed on food for dogs and cats. It is not as effective as directly cleaning your pet's teeth but will still help reduce the build up of plaque.
- Chew bars e.g. **Royal Canin Oral Bars, Pedigree Dentastix** and **Dentagen Chew Bars** - these are highly palatable and work by gently abrading your dog's teeth when he or she chews.



- **Dentagen oral water** can be used in your pet's drinking water daily to again reduce the build up of plaque on your pet's teeth and to prevent bad breath.
- There are some food products that are specifically designed to help your pet's teeth – they combine mechanical and chemical actions to help reduce the build up of plaque and tartar. There is a specific **Royal Canin Dental** diet, but the life stage diets also incorporate these actions too e.g. **Young male/female feline** and **Adult** and **Neutered Adult Canine**.