

The Signs of Dental Disease in Dogs, Cats & Rabbits

How do you know if your pet has dental disease?

Contrary to popular opinion, dogs and cats with dental disease rarely stop eating completely and do generally continue to behave relatively normally despite in many instances quite severe and significant problems. In the earlier stages of some conditions there may in fact be very few signs and no pain but early recognition and interventional treatment can be important to prevent the problem worsening. Even when conditions are more advanced, the symptoms are often subtle and frequently go unnoticed. Our pets can't tell us they are experiencing discomfort, they do not know they can be helped and they often carry on suffering quietly.



So what do you need to look out for?

10 possible symptoms of dental disease:

1. Halitosis (bad breath)
2. Grumpy behaviour
3. May be head shy and resent mouth being touched
4. Poor grooming
5. Often withdrawn and spend more time sleeping – this is especially so with cats
6. Some of these symptoms may be mistakenly attributed to 'old age'
7. May avoid harder food
8. May avoid eating on one side of mouth
9. Swelling or discharge on side of face
10. Severe pain is usually only experienced following recent tooth fracture or tooth root infection. In these cases your pet may be off colour, not eating, dribbling and may have a temperature.

If your pet is co-operative you may be able to look inside his or her mouth. Or you might be able to take a brief hands-off look when your pet yawns or pants.

10 common signs to look for inside the mouth:

1. Red gums
2. Swollen or bleeding gums
3. Soft sticky yellowish deposit on the teeth – this is plaque
4. A hard brown deposit on the teeth - this is tartar (calculus)
5. Exposed tooth roots and/or loose teeth
6. Yellow discharge from gums which may indicate infection
7. Missing teeth (especially in cats)
8. Teeth with red spots or holes (especially in cats)
9. Broken teeth
10. Discoloured teeth. White or cream is normal. Grey-blue or purple is not normal and occurs due trauma within the tooth

Effective treatment is almost always possible and can prevent significant discomfort and poor health. If your pet has one or more of the symptoms or signs described above he or she needs to see a vet. Please call your nearest practice and make an appointment.

What about the pet rabbit?

Rabbits get dental disease too! In fact it is one of the most common problems seen in pet rabbits. It can be very serious and potentially life-threatening. Rabbits teeth grow continuously and can wear unevenly. When this happens pointed spikes form on the side of the teeth which cause painful sometimes infected

wounds on the tongue and cheeks. The tooth roots become distorted and overlong and frequently develop abscesses.

Unlike cats and dogs, rabbits DO frequently stop eating which is a serious concern. This can lead to gut paralysis, which in turn can lead to rapid deterioration, possible collapse and death.

Rabbits with dental problems can usually be treated but early intervention is very important.

8 common signs of dental disease in rabbits:

1. Poor grooming/poor coat condition
2. Wet chin/dribbling
3. Runny eyes
4. Jaw swelling
5. Dirty bottom
6. Difficulty eating
7. Depression and lethargy
8. Not eating

If your rabbit is showing any of these signs he/she needs to be examined by a vet. Any rabbit that is not eating normally should be seen urgently as a potential emergency.

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