

## KEEP THOSE CANINES CLEAN

Periodontal disease is the leading cause of acquired heart disease in pets. No kidding! Senior pets don't eat to excess (unless WE feed them too much). They don't abuse alcohol or tobacco, nor do they stress over mortgage payments or an over-scheduled lifestyle. But they also don't brush and floss their teeth or visit the dentist regularly. Over time, plaque and tartar accumulate and lead to periodontal disease. From the mouth, bacteria get into the blood stream and travel to the heart where they lodge on the heart valves and cause endocarditis. A heart murmur then develops.

So if you find yourself cringing and turning your head when your faithful friend bestows a kiss, and wishing that you could give him a breath mint, then a professional dental examination and cleaning are in order. With the advent of newer and safer anesthetic agents, you need not fear general anesthesia in your golden aged companion. I strongly recommend pre-anesthetic blood screening, IV catheter placement (this is your pet's lifeline), anesthesia with sevoflurane gas (this is the anesthesia your doctor would use on YOU), and state of the art anesthesia monitoring. Using all these safety precautions, we have performed dental procedures on patients approaching 20 years of age. Owners often remark that the dental care provided gives their pet a new lease on life.

Just as humans need to brush every day between trips to the dentist, pets need regular home dental care to prevent periodontal disease. Getting owners into this healthy daily habit with their pets, however, can be a challenge. One simple daily routine-tooth brushing-can have a major impact on your dog's health.

Based on their own dental health, people have little trouble understanding the need to protect their pet's teeth. The awareness is growing. *Good Morning America*, as well as other well-known TV shows, has prominently featured segments about the need for pet dental care.

February is National Pet Dental Health Month, the importance of in-clinic cleanings and keeping a pet's teeth clean on a daily basis. Professional dental cleanings are vital. And we've now learned that home care, in-between cleanings, is also critical to protect a pet's teeth and overall health. "The prevention of dental disease should be as natural to pet owners as vaccinations and heartworm prevention" said Dr. Jane. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) estimates that by age three, 80 percent of dogs show signs of oral disease.

Most dogs don't get cavities. They do get periodontal disease, which causes bad breath and tooth loss. Aside from the aesthetic issues like bad breath, a mouth full of germs can also spread infections to the pet's human caretakers. Worst of all, bad breath can trigger serious, even life threatening, health problems in the dog, including heart, kidney, liver, and joint disease.

"We encourage in-home dental care.", says Dr. Jane. "The approach recognizes that each patient (and their owner) has different needs", says Dr. Jane. There are a variety of products available we call the choices GOOD, BETTER and BEST. The best choice for you is the one you will do.

To get started, a professional oral exam allows us to recommend the most appropriate home dental care program based on your pet's stage of disease and your ability to comply with recommendations.

Three options for home dental care are:

1. **GOOD.** The easiest method of home care for pet owners, dental chews are easy for pets to chew and digest, and provide good oral hygiene for any cat or dog.

2. **BETTER.** Daily care is even easier when owners add water additive to your pet's water bowl. Formulated by veterinary dental specialists, it helps prevent plaque accumulation, freshens pet's breath with every drink, and provides another layer of protection for dental health.
3. **BEST.** The best method of home care is toothbrushing, which is surprisingly quick and easy. Consistency is important since brushing requires training. It's also important to use products specifically designed for pets, such as the right sized toothbrush with soft bristles and pet-friendly flavored toothpastes.

So, how many times a day or week or month do you brush their teeth? In reality, it's sometimes not convenient to brush a pet's teeth twice a day, so we usually recommend at least weekly, if not daily brushing. More is definitely better, if a pet doesn't like to have his teeth brushed, that's okay. Any dental care you can do at home is a step in the right direction. The idea of brushing an animal's teeth can be a little daunting, but it's really quite easy. There are products out there that can make the brushing experience more enjoyable for your pets and you.

**Best To Brush: The Basics** \* Start when your pet is young (or adult age after a thorough dental cleaning). Slowly introduce the pet to veterinary dental toothpastes and soft-bristled brushes.

- Brushes should be the appropriate size and shape for a pet's mouth. There are even brushes made for cats. If you don't know what size to use, just ask.
- Make sure the paste used is **veterinarian recommended**. Human products can actually cause more harm than good.
- Toothpastes come in multiple flavors, usually beef, chicken, seafood or malt so that they are tasty to your pet and help him look forward to brushing.
- Start by letting a pet taste the toothpaste, then put the toothpaste on a finger or a washcloth and run it along the gum line. Finally, use toothpaste on the brush along the gum line.
- Be sure to push the toothpaste into the bristles of the brush to keep the pet from just eating or licking it. The brush needs to be angled under the gums because this is where the bacteria that cause dental disease like to hide.
- Using small circles, brush from the back to the front of the mouth. Start with outer surfaces of the teeth (facing the cheek) and move to inner surfaces (facing the tongue). The outer surfaces of the teeth are where the most plaque and tartar build up, so reaching them is critical.
- The whole process should only take about 30 seconds.

The bottom line for home dental care is that frequent brushing (along with chews and water additives) not only helps protect a pet's teeth, it can help to save him from painful dental disease.

\*For a FREE dental exam and to receive \$50.00 off your pets cleaning and FREE Dental Health food from Purina call for your appointment 828-478-3500.

\*certain restrictions apply