



SEASIDE PET CLINIC

Quality Medicine with a Personal Touch

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The Importance of Dental Hygiene to the Health of your Dog or Cat

We all appreciate the importance of dental hygiene in maintaining the health of our teeth and gums. Quite apart from anything else, it is not very pleasant to be in the general vicinity of someone who doesn't brush their teeth. Your pet is no different. He or she needs to have his or her teeth brushed regularly to avoid gum disease and to remain a pleasure to be around. Unfortunately, unlike humans, pets can't look after their own teeth, and so rely on you to help them out in this regard.

Even with regular brushing, it is necessary to have your teeth cleaned from time to time. Your dentist looks after this for you probably about once or twice a year. For your pet, your vet is qualified to fill this role. The procedure is commonplace today and, in combination with brushing your pet's teeth on a regular basis, will help prevent the development of one of the most common diseases in dogs and cats: periodontal disease.

"Periodontal" comes from two Greek words that mean "around the tooth". Periodontal disease is started by germs present in plaque which attack the gums, bone, and ligaments that support the teeth and hold them in the jaw. Most pets suffer from this disease to some extent. Signs include halitosis (bad breath) and difficulty in eating or chewing. In some cases your pet may become listless or lethargic. It is a progressive disease which usually starts out as gingivitis, an infection affecting the gum tissue. At this point the disease is still reversible with adequate oral hygiene. However, if the disease is not treated, it may progress to the moderate stage. Moderate disease is characterized by gums, bone and other structures that support the teeth becoming damaged. Advanced periodontal disease results in severe gum recession with the loss of supporting bone and subsequent loss of teeth. A further complication of periodontal disease is that the bacteria involved in causing the disease can enter the bloodstream and travel to other parts of the body (kidneys, liver, and heart) causing secondary infection.

The first step in preventing periodontal disease is maintaining good oral health for your pet. This can be accomplished by brushing your pet's teeth on a regular basis while paying attention to diet. If brushing is not possible, there are also many alternatives your vet can discuss with you. Brushing is the most effective way of mechanically removing plaque, while a suitable diet can reduce the accumulation of plaque. Feeding your pet soft or sticky foods on a continual basis should be avoided and should be interspersed with feeding harder, crunchier food. The chewing action required to break down harder foodstuffs has a cleansing effect on the teeth. While brushing and diet play a major part in the maintenance of good oral health, it is still necessary to have your dog or cat's teeth cleaned on a regular basis by your veterinarian to remove hard-to-get-at plaque and tartar.

The bacteria that cause periodontal disease attach the gums and erode the tissue that supports the teeth and keeps them in a healthy state. The more severe the disease, the more tissue that is likely to have been destroyed. Without supportive tissue, the tooth will eventually fall out or have to be removed. It is possible to arrest the effects of the disease by removing the bacteria that cause the disease. However, these bacteria frequently reside beneath the gum line and cannot be removed by brushing alone. It may be necessary from time to time for your vet to clean beneath the gum line to treat this problem. Avoid this terrible and painful disease; call your vet today for an appointment to have those teeth cleaned.