

The Progression of Gingivitis to Periodontal Disease in the Canine and Feline Patient Prepared for Your Pet Animal

Diagnosis: DENTAL DISEASE, GRADE III

Imagine how your teeth would look and feel if you didn't brush them daily. The same applies to your pet's teeth. Unless you are regularly providing some form of dental care, you are neglecting an important factor in the overall health of your pet.

Periodontal (gum) disease is one of the most common conditions seen by veterinarians today. The problem begins when plaque and tartar are allowed to build up on your pet's teeth. Plaque harbors the bacteria, which can infect gum tissue and the roots of teeth resulting in disease and tooth loss. Besides the negative impact on the oral cavity, bacteria can enter the bloodstream through the large network of blood vessels located near the gums and teeth.

Home Care

Since tooth brushing is considered the most effective means of removing plaque, we recommend an oral hygiene program which includes brushing your pet's teeth. It is important to use toothpaste designed for pets. Pet toothpastes have flavors that appeal to pets and need not be rinsed. Do not use human toothpaste or baking soda. These products often contain ingredients that should not be swallowed.

When brushing is not practical, veterinarians may recommend an antibacterial oral rinse or gel for some pets. These products are formulated specifically for pets, and with daily use, they can help slow accumulation of dental plaque.

Signs and Symptoms of Poor Oral Health

- Persistent bad breath
- Sensitivity around the mouth
- Pawing at the mouth
- Loss of appetite
- Plaque (often not visible unless stained)
- Bleeding, inflamed, or receded gums
- Tartar (creamy-brown, hard material)
- Loose or missing teeth
- Difficulty eating and chewing food

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. Dry food, biscuits, and newly formulated abrasive diets can be helpful in removing plaque above the gumline. In addition, specially treated abrasive dental chews are also available for both cats and dogs. Providing your pet with these abrasive, resilient dental chews is often a good alternative for those days when you cannot brush. **However, only tooth brushing can remove plaque and food debris below the gumline.** It is below the gumline where disease-causing bacteria flourish, resulting in irritation, inflammation and infection.

Dental Prophylaxis

The first step in promoting oral health is to contact your veterinarian for a thorough oral examination. At this time, it may be necessary to have your pet's teeth cleaned above and below the gumline. Like people, animals need this professional attention on a regular basis. This cleaning will require your pet to be placed under general anesthesia. If you have any concerns regarding anesthesia, please discuss them with your veterinarian.

Grading System

Grade I - Mild Gingivitis: Margin of attached gingiva (gum) is inflamed and swollen. Plaque covering teeth. Treatment can reverse condition.

Grade II – Moderate Gingivitis: Entire attached gingiva (gum) is inflamed and swollen. Mouth is painful and odor begins to be noticeable. Professional treatment and home dental care can prevent this from becoming irreversible.

Grade III – Severe Gingivitis: Cherry red and bleeding attached gingiva (gum). Gingiva is becoming destroyed by infection and calculus (tartar). Sore mouth affects eating and behavior. Bad breath is present. Beginning of periodontal disease. May become irreversible.

Grade IV – Periodontal Disease: Chronic bacterial infection is destroying the gum, tooth and bone. Bacteria are spreading throughout the body via the bloodstream and may affect other organs.