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Canine Dental Care

This is a very common problem that affects a dog's mouth and gums. It can start silently with no obvious signs or symptoms but advances quickly, causing chronic pain, eroded gums, missing teeth and even bone loss. In fact gum disease is so common, studies show over 80% of dogs suffer a stage of gum disease before they are three years old.

Periodontal disease

Bacteria causes gum disease (periodontal disease). Straight after your dog eats, bacteria, along with food, saliva and other particles, forms a sticky film called "plaque" over the surfaces of the teeth and gums.

Gum disease is 5 times more common in dogs than humans as dogs have a more alkaline mouth, promoting plaque formation. Also, most dogs don't have their teeth brushed every day, giving plaque-forming bacteria the chance they need to multiply.



Gingivitis

Gingivitis (reddening of the gums) can initially be very subtle, making them more likely to bleed. If plaque is not removed it hardens over time and becomes tartar which is a brown/yellow hard substance on your dog's teeth and is the perfect surface for even more plaque to stick to. Mild gingivitis is very common in dogs of all ages. It can occur as quickly as 48 hours after cleaning when plaque formation will have begun. Mild gingivitis does not affect the tooth root and brushing the teeth on a daily basis easily reverses most cases.

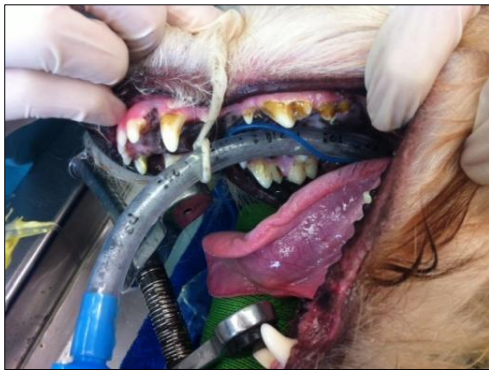
Moderate gingivitis is also very common. If plaque is allowed to form on the teeth then the gingiva will become more inflamed as time progresses. Sometimes gum recession can be seen at this stage. Gingival "pockets" may also be evident. A gingival pocket is where the gum has started to separate from the tooth, providing a perfect site for food, bacteria, plaque and tartar to form. If calculus hasn't already formed, most cases of moderate gingivitis can also be reversed with regular daily or twice daily brushing. However pocket formation is difficult to reverse.

Severe gingivitis can be very painful for a dog. Severe gingivitis is common in dogs that have a lot of plaque and calculus on their teeth. Gum recession is also common, but may not always be obvious since the gums are so inflamed. Gingival pockets can sometimes be seen and are usually deeper than those found with moderate gingivitis. Severe gingivitis cannot usually be reversed

with brushing, and often the mouths are too sore to brush. The dog will usually require a general anaesthetic to carry out a scale and polish of the teeth. If there is a severe degree of gum recession exposing the tooth root then the tooth may need to be extracted.

Danger Signs

Dental disease can be painful but most animals are extremely good at covering up the signs and will rarely stop eating. Clinical signs of advanced dental disease include; Bad breath, Reddened gums, Yellowish-brown tartar on teeth, Drooling, Trouble eating and growling at food. When gingivitis is severe dogs may drop their food from their mouths, chew on one side, and lose weight because they are unable to eat. Therefore it is important for regular checkups, particularly for older dogs. There are a number of factors that can predispose dogs to dental disease;



Tooth Alignment

Teeth that are positioned abnormally in the mouth are more likely to accumulate plaque and tartar than those which are correctly positioned. Short nosed breeds e.g. Pugs, French Bulldogs, British Bulldogs, Boston Terriers often have abnormally positioned teeth. Their jawbones are often too small to accommodate the dentition, resulting in overcrowding and misalignment of teeth.

Deciduous Tooth Retention

In some circumstances, deciduous teeth (baby/milk teeth) are retained after the permanent teeth have grown through (erupted). If the adult tooth does not push out the deciduous tooth when it erupts the adult tooth may be forced to grow in an abnormally resulting in permanent misalignment.

Prevention is better than Cure

Preventing gum disease should be a part of your routine canine care. Along with regular dental checks at the vets, brushing your dog's teeth daily, just like ours, will help your dog maintain a healthy mouth. Owners are reluctant to brush their dog's teeth as they think their dog won't like it, but most respond well. Introducing the process gradually, using rewards and doggie toothpaste, you'll be brushing in no time! It is best to introduce this when your dog is a puppy as they grow up thinking it's quite normal.

Feeding quality dog food, dental diets or special foods that prevent plaque from hardening are also options to consider. Please ask the vet for further advice on brushing techniques and food options.

Remember, most pet insurance policies don't cover dental work so it's even more important to look after your pet's teeth.



Dental Care Products

Dentagen Aqua Solution can be added to fresh drinking water which is designed to stop plaque sticking to teeth in the first place. It is pleasant tasting and freshens breath.

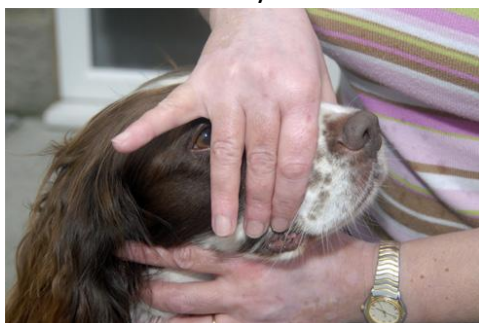
There are meat flavoured toothpastes to help your dog tolerate and accept the brushing process. Do not use human toothpaste as it is not designed to be swallowed and can be harmful to your pet.

A step by step guide to brushing your dogs teeth

STEP ONE: Let your dog settle - perhaps after having had a lick of the toothpaste. But do make them sit – a moving target is far harder to deal with!



STEP TWO: Place your hand on their muzzle.



STEP THREE: Gently push the lip in between the teeth – this gently holds the mouth open. It also helps stop the chewing on the toothbrush that many dogs do to start off with.



STEP FOUR: Gently place the toothbrush onto the rows of teeth. The double sided brush will fit neatly over the teeth. Gently rub the toothbrush back and forwards to clean the teeth and remove plaque.



STEP FIVE: Make sure that both the upper and lower jaws and both sides of the mouth are well cleaned.



If you manage to brush your dogs teeth regularly and use a sensible diet your dog's mouth can stay healthy - like this mouth pictured below.



Reward

It is very important to reward your pet with lots of praise during and after tooth brushing. A DentaStix, or Oral Bar or similar treat that has been proven to assist in oral hygiene can make a great reward. However, the greatest reward your dog will receive is that their health will be significantly improved and many problems can be avoided by regular tooth brushing. Tooth brushing is a vital part of your pet's health care, it is just as important as their regular vaccinations.