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DENTAL HEALTH CARE AND DISEASE PREVENTION

Dental care is one of the most important things you can do for your pet to improve both their quality of life and longevity. Dental disease not only causes pain in the mouth but also causes damage to the internal organs of the body thereby potentially decreasing your pets' life span. Dental disease causes inflammation of the gums and tooth decay which allows bacteria access to the blood stream. Once in the blood stream these bacteria and their toxins literally shower the internal organs, such as the heart and kidneys, leading to organ damage and accelerated deterioration.

Dental care is something ideally started when your pet is still a puppy or kitten. We recommend training your kitten or puppy to accept having their teeth brushed - a job that is not really that hard, even with older dogs and cats. Approach the task with a positive attitude, take it slow and easy, and then follow with something the pet likes – a play session or a food treat. There are tooth pastes especially made for pets that are safe for them to swallow.

Available now are “dental health care” diets that help to clean the teeth as the pet chews the kibble and contain ingredients that help keep plaque from forming. Our hospital sells a maintenance diet called T/D diet for teeth. There are also several diets available over the counter.

There are many products that are available that help to clean the teeth with given to pets as treats. CET chews and Greenies are two such examples.

For kittens and puppies, the focus is on training and prevention, but adult pets will likely need veterinary attention before a preventative care program can help. During your pets annual wellness exam we will check your pet's mouth, teeth, and gums and we can make recommendations based on what we find there. For many pets, the next step will be a complete dentistry under anesthesia. The procedure takes an average of about 45 minutes to an hour, and involves not only cleaning and polishing the teeth, but also checking for and treating broken or rotting teeth, cavities, abscesses and periodontal disease.

Today's anesthetics are dramatically safer than those of even a few years ago, making the dangers and pain of untreated dental problems the bigger risk to health, even with older pets.

In our library website, there is a dental cost estimate for patients needing professional dental care.

After the problems are treated, at-home care can keep things in good shape. Here are some tips:

- ✓ Brush or wipe regularly. Use toothpaste designed for animals, a couple of times a week at least, although daily is better. Do not use toothpaste made for people, because animals do not know how to rinse and spit. Pet toothpastes contain enzymes that help dissolve plaque and can be swallowed. They also have a flavor pets appreciate. Use a toothbrush made for pets, or a children's toothbrush. You can also use plain gauze wrapped around a finger or a fingertip brush.
- ✓ Offer teeth cleaning toys. Soft chew toys and a chew rope can help keep teeth clean. Avoid chews that are hard or are prone to breaking into sharp pieces. These can break teeth, slice gums, and even cause GI distress.
- ✓ Consider a teeth-cleaning diet as previously mentioned.

Once your pet's teeth are in good shape, you will immediately notice an end to bad breath. The true benefits of dental care go far beyond a better smelling mouth; however, making what seems on the surface to be an aesthetic issue one that is in fact a cornerstone of a preventative –care program.