

February is National Pet Dental Health Month

Every year certain organization such as the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Veterinary Dental Society work in conjunction with other groups to promote pet dental awareness. Did you know that oral disease is the most frequently diagnosed health problem of dogs and cats? According to the American Veterinary Dental Society 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of dental disease by the age of 3.

Dental disease begins with bacterial build up in the mouth. The bacteria in conjunction with food debris form plaque accumulations on the tooth. These plaque accumulations can then mix with calcium deposits and form tartar. This starts a cascade of events which leads to inflammation and infection resulting in periodontal disease which can then lead to tooth loss.

Some signs of oral health issues are bad breath, painful mouth, difficulty eating, drooling, and/or discoloration of the teeth just to name a few. Even if your pet is not showing signs of problems it is worth asking your veterinarian for a dental checkup.

But be warned, oral disease does not stay in the mouth, the inflammation and infection can spread to other organs in the body such as the heart, kidneys, and liver. The good news is that oral disease is usually preventable. Prevention includes annual veterinary exams to assess the overall health of your pet including his or hers teeth. It also includes a good at home dental care program including tooth brushing with approved pet toothpaste.

If your pet is diagnosed with periodontal disease your veterinarian should discuss with you what stage of disease he or she is at and an appropriate treatment plan. Most treatment plans include a thorough ultrasonic cleaning under anesthesia. Dental radiographs (X rays) may also be indicated depending on your veterinarian's exam findings. If tooth extraction is necessary during the procedure be sure that your pet has good pain medication and appropriate antibiotics if indicated. There are many dental tools at our hand that may be recommended for your pet post procedure – dental diets, dental chews, oral rinses, sealants and don't forget tooth brushing to just name a few.

Make this month the start of your pet's new dental care plan. Schedule a visit with your veterinarian. Discuss your pet's dental health. Schedule a dental cleaning if needed. And most importantly follow up with a home care plan suggested by your veterinarian.

Remember, pets need dental care too.

Dr. Monica Dijanic

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