

February is
National Pet Dental Health Awareness Month

Dr. Jyl,

I recently brought my cat "Buddy," into the vet because I noticed he was pawing at his face, drooling and having trouble eating. He seemed depressed and would not drink water or even eat his favorite treats. My vet examined "Buddy," and performed a blood panel and urinalysis. "Buddy" was diagnosed with severe gingivitis, dental disease, anorexia and dehydration. "Buddy" had dental disease. My vet cleaned his teeth and even pulled a few. It has been a few weeks now and "Buddy" is back to his old normal self. I had no idea how important healthy teeth can be for the longevity of my pet. My vet tells me I can brush his teeth but this is a difficult task for me and "Buddy" hates it! Are there any other products or alternatives to prevent this from happening again?

TJ Sherman
Citrus Heights

Dear Sandy,

February is national pet dental health month. This is a national campaign designed to educate pet owners about the importance of proper dental care for your pet. For more information on this national campaign contact www.petdental.com.

Dental care comes in two forms: professional cleaning and polishing at the veterinary clinic, and brushing at home. If you are unable to brush your pet's teeth there are products to help dissolve and prevent tartar buildup. These products can be directly added to your pet's water dish or can be administered directly by pump spray on their teeth and gums (Oxyfresh Oral Hygiene Solution is an example).

Although brushing may be difficult, start your pet at a young age. Begin by simply rubbing your finger gently on the gums. Ask your veterinarian to demonstrate and recommend what tooth pastes and or gels to use. (CET flavored toothpaste and Oxyfresh Aloe Vera gel are two examples.) There are also a variety of dental wipes and dissolvable time release gum tablets available. Your veterinarian will know which product is best for your pet.

Proper diets also play an important role in prevention of dental disease. Just like humans, pet's dental problems begin with plaque, a soft sticky residue that hardens over time into tartar. Tartar buildup leads to gum infections, painful abscesses in the mouth, loss of teeth, and can contribute to heart and kidney disease.

As your pet ages they may require a professional dental cleaning performed by your veterinarian. This may need to be done as often as every 6-18 months. An astounding 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats over the age of three already show signs of periodontal disease. Professional dental cleanings are usually performed while your pet is under general anesthesia. Your vet may recommend a complete blood panel, and urinalysis to detect underlying conditions prior to the dental cleaning. Some vets will prescribe antibiotics and pain medication prior to, and after the cleaning. A thorough physical examination, heart monitor, IV catheter and fluids are also important while the dental procedure is performed.

Regular dental care is important for your pet's health. Your pet will feel better and avoid illness in later years if his or her teeth are kept clean now. Remember, brushing your pet's teeth or using other oral preventatives as a regular routine can play an important part of their everyday overall health.

