

# Dental Disease In Dogs and Cats

**Dental disease is the most common disease seen by veterinarians** . Approximately 70 percent of cats over the age of 3 years and 85 percent of dogs over the age of 5 years have dental disease. Signs may include bad breath, red or swollen gums, or reluctance to eat. Most owners have no idea there are any dental problems with their pets and are shocked to see the condition of the mouth at a routine veterinary visit.

What causes dental disease?

Most problems are due to plaque, tarter or calculus accumulation of the tooth surface. Plaque forms first on the surface, and if not removed, mineralizes and turns to tarter or calculus. Bacteria and decoying food stuck in the tarter cause oral odor. This accumulation of tarter and bacteria leads to infection and gingivitis or inflammation of the gums which can then lead to dental abscesses or pus accumulation and even more foul odor. If caught in the early stages, a thorough veterinary dental scaling and polishing can totally reverse the dental disease. However, if gingivitis is allowed to persist untreated, then irreversible periodontal disease will occur. Periodontal disease involves destruction of bone and tooth ligaments, possible dental abscesses and loss of teeth. Once periodontal disease starts, the degenerative changes cannot be reversed. Many cats will also get cervical neck lesions, which result from progressive destruction of the enamel. This exposes the sensitive parts of the tooth and is very painful. The only treatment is dental extraction. We do not know the cause of feline neck lesions but poor oral hygiene is suspected to play a role.

Dental disease if untreated can lead to further health problems such as cardiac (heart) disease, renal (kidney) disease, hepatic (liver) disease, systemic infections and the progression of cancer.

**Cats and dogs should receive a dental exam at least once a year** . Most cats and dogs should get a **dental prophylactic every 1-3 years** pending the amount of dental disease noted. A prophylactic involves exam, anesthesia, dental scaling, polishing and a fluoride treatment. Sometimes extractions and or antibiotics are necessary.

It is recommended that humans have a thorough dental cleaning every 6 months and that we brush our teeth 2-3 times a day. Although not possible with some pets, tooth brushing and/or oral rinses done by the owner will greatly help with oral health and slow the progression of dental disease by removing the plaque on the tooth surface. This should be started early in a pets life so they will accept it more readily. Remember to use pet toothpaste and not human toothpaste. You should ask your veterinarian what they recommend for your pet.

The photos below demonstrate **severe dental disease in a 6 year old** dog before and after a dental prophy or cleaning. There is severe periodontal disease with dental calculus, pus and gingivitis. Six extractions were required and he should have regular dental cleanings every 6-12 months. His disease is not reversible but hopefully will be controlled with frequent dental exams and at home dental care. His breath is now much much improved!



Dental - Prior to Cleaning



Dental - After Cleaning