



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DENTAL DISEASE

Dental disease is the most commonly occurring disease in pet dogs and cats, but in spite of this, it continues to be the most overlooked and undertreated disease in small animal veterinary medicine. **Over 80% of dogs and 70% of cats 2 years of age and older suffer from periodontal disease.** In addition, 50% of cats over 3 years of age are affected by a painful condition called tooth resorption which results in erosion of the roots of affected teeth. It is important to note that in addition to causing problems in the mouth, periodontal disease can lead to bacteria gaining access to the blood stream, causing severe damage to the kidneys, liver and heart. **Studies have shown that pets who have appropriate dental care live an average of 2 - 4 years longer than those who don't .**

WHAT IS DENTAL DISEASE?

Imagine what would happen if you stopped brushing your own teeth. The cause of dental disease in dogs and cats is the same as it is for humans. When the surfaces of the teeth are not kept clean, plaque (an accumulation of bacteria) builds up at the gumline. Plaque becomes mineralized over time, producing calculus (or tartar). If left untreated, plaque and tartar cause inflammation and irritation of gum tissue which is called **GINGIVITIS**. It is important to note that gingivitis is treatable and reversible if the surfaces of the teeth are kept clean. If left untreated, gingivitis will always lead to periodontal disease.

PERIODONTAL DISEASE by definition is infection and inflammation of some or all of a tooth's support and occurs **below the gumline**, where it cannot be seen with the naked eye. When bacteria are allowed to invade below the gumline, the soft tissue and bone around the tooth are eroded resulting in painful, loose teeth. In addition, this bacteria can gain access to the blood stream and result in damage to the liver, kidneys and heart. Unlike gingivitis, periodontal disease is not curable or reversible, but it can be managed with appropriate periodontal therapy.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY PET IS SUFFERING FROM DENTAL DISEASE?

Unfortunately, many dogs and cats with dental disease suffer in silence and don't show any outward signs of dental problems. Many of these pets have to live with constant oral pain and flu like symptoms daily but are unable to communicate this to their owners. Some of the symptoms that can be noticed by owners are as follows:

- ** Bad breath (halitosis)
- ** Broken, worn down, or discolored teeth
- ** Excessive drooling/ salivation
- ** Reluctance to eat (especially dry food) or play with toys
- ** Chewing only on one side of the mouth
- ** Pawing at or rubbing the face or muzzle
- ** Bleeding from the mouth
- ** Swelling below the eye
- ** Chronic eye drainage or infection
- ** Chronic sneezing
- ** Discharge from the nose

** Excessive tartar build up on teeth

Just like people, all dogs and cats should have their teeth examined by a veterinarian every 6 months.

If you would like to schedule a FREE DENTAL EXAM with one of our Doctors at 5 Points Animal Hospital, call us at 615-750-2377 today. The purpose of a FREE DENTAL EXAM is to determine whether your pet's dental disease can be treated medically or if your pet needs a dental procedure under anesthesia. If a dental procedure is needed, one of our Doctors will set up a consult for your pet with our board certified dentist, Dr. Keith Stein. His consultation fee is \$75.00.

HOW IS DENTAL DISEASE BEST TREATED?

The key to management of dental disease is **PREVENTION**. As long as the surfaces of the teeth are kept clean, bacteria cannot colonize below the gumline resulting in inflammation and infection. When good home care is instituted early in a pet's life, gingivitis and periodontal disease can often be prevented.

** Daily brushing

Daily brushing of your pet's teeth can be an easy and enjoyable procedure that prevents the build up of plaque. Special toothbrushes and flavored toothpastes are available for dogs and cats, and your veterinarian can instruct you how to best brush your pet's teeth. **NEVER USE HUMAN**

TOOTHPASTE FOR YOUR PET!

** Daily chewing activities

Daily use of foods and treats approved by the **Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC)** can help to keep teeth clean and prevent the accumulation of plaque. On the other hand, allowing your pet to chew on objects harder than the teeth can result in broken or fractured teeth. Engaging in tug of war games with toys in young puppies and kittens who do not have their permanent teeth in yet can traumatize growing teeth and should also be avoided.

By the time many of our patients come to see us for their teeth to be evaluated, gingivitis and/or periodontal disease is already present, and home care is not enough to restore dental health. **This is the point at which most pet owners are told that their pet needs a "dental cleaning" that will cost \$X, and I would like to take this opportunity to address a common misconception in veterinary dentistry. That misconception is that a routine dental cleaning performed by a general veterinary practitioner is all that is needed to both evaluate and treat any dental problem that might be encountered in a dog or cat's mouth. This is most definitely NOT the case, and performing "cookie cutter" dental cleanings is not only malpractice but also a grave disservice to our animal patients. IF** only gingivitis is present, a routine cleaning may be all that is needed to restore dental health, and this consists of removing all tartar attached to the teeth, cleaning and polishing the part of the tooth visible above the gumline, and then applying fluoride to all the teeth. That said, after tartar is removed and the teeth are clean, additional problems that necessitate additional treatments often become evident in the mouth such as fractured, loose or infected teeth, and exposed tooth roots just to name a few. In addition, the part of the tooth that is below the gumline and not visible to the naked eye is not evaluated or treated during a routine cleaning; If intraoral xrays are not taken to visualize periodontal structures and the tooth roots, periodontal disease will not be diagnosed or treated which is never in the best interest of our patients. In summary, it is important to realize that a routine dental cleaning is only a very small part of veterinary dentistry as a whole. Just like in human medicine, dentistry is a specialty unto itself and advanced training along with specialized equipment is necessary to not only be able to identify dental problems but also to be able to effectively treat these problems. At 5 Points Animal Hospital, we feel very strongly that if one of our patients is anesthetized for a dental procedure, all of the problems in the mouth need to be identified and properly treated. For this reason, all of our dental patients are cared for by a board certified veterinary dentist, Dr. Keith Stein. We do not offer "cookie cutter" dental cleaning packages as no two mouths are the same, and each individual patient should be thoroughly evaluated and provided a treatment plan tailored to their individual dental needs.

WHY MUST MY PET UNDERGO ANESTHESIA FOR A DENTAL PROCEDURE?

Anesthesia is necessary to performing any dental procedure on a pet for three reasons:

** We need to immobilize the pet to adequately evaluate the teeth and take intraoral xrays, and then to clean the teeth and perform any other treatments that are necessary if additional problems are found.

** We need to manage pain with intravenous pain medications and intraoral nerve blocks to numb the mouth so that post-operative discomfort is minimal.

** We need to place a tracheal tube in the airway to protect the respiratory system from bacteria and aspirated stomach contents.

To ensure safety, we perform pre-operative physical examinations and lab testing on all pets undergoing anesthesia, carefully select anesthetics based on the age and overall health of the patient, and monitor our patients very carefully while under anesthesia with monitoring devices similar to those used in human hospitals. **AT 5 POINTS ANIMAL HOSPITAL, WE FEEL STRONGLY THAT THE RISK OF ALLOWING YOUR PET'S DENTAL DISEASE TO GO UNTREATED IS FAR GREATER THAN THE RISK OF THEM UNDERGOING ANESTHESIA FOR A DENTAL PROCEDURE.**

WHAT DOES A DENTAL PROCEDURE ENTAIL?

A breakdown of a typical dental procedure would be as follows:

- ** Pre-operative physical exam and lab testing
- ** Oral exam under anesthesia and nerve blocks if needed
- ** Dental cleaning - removal of tartar, subgingival scaling, root planing, curettage
- ** Tooth polishing and fluoride application
- ** Post cleaning exam including periodontal probing and intraoral xrays
- ** Periodontal therapy, Endodontic surgery, Extractions if/ when needed
- ** Home care plan instructions
- ** Follow - up appointments every 6 months to evaluate effectiveness of home care

HOW MUCH DOES A DENTAL PROCEDURE COST?

It is often impossible to determine exactly how much a dental procedure will cost until the pet is anesthetized. After the teeth are cleaned and tartar removed, each tooth is examined, probed and xrayed (if indicated), and a treatment plan is made based on these findings. If you think your pet may be suffering from dental disease, the first step is to bring your pet in for a **FREE DENTAL EXAM** with one of our general practitioner Doctors. This will help us to determine whether your pet needs home care or a dental procedure under anesthesia. If a dental procedure is indicated, we will set up a consult for your pet with our board certified veterinary dentist, Dr. Keith Stein. **Alternatively, you may call Dr. Stein directly at 615-618-4547 to set up a dental consultation for your pet at a cost of \$75.00.**

At 5 Points Animal Hospital, we always strive to offer the very best veterinary care available to all of our patients and are here to service all of your pet's individual dental needs. If you have any questions or concerns about your pet's dental health, please call us at 615-750-2377 today!