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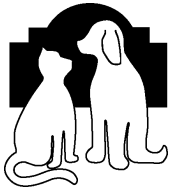
Preventative Medicine: Dental disease

February is veterinary dental month. We've decided it's a great time to inform you about your pet's teeth and the importance of proper care of them. Most pet owners are aware of symptoms of advanced dental disease such as halitosis, discoloration of the teeth, and acute pain. Most pet owners are not aware that dental disease can cause tooth loss, chronic pain, and systemic disease due to bacterial spread. Most pet owners are unaware that dental disease does not just involve the teeth, but the gums are actually more important. First we will discuss tooth and gum problems, then we will focus on dental disease prevention.

With human teeth, caries or cavities are a big problem. Caries are quite rare in dogs and cats. With dog teeth, the most common problems that we see are fractures, tartar, calculus, and wearing of the teeth from chewing metal, bones, and tennis balls. Tartar is soft and white-yellow in color. Calculus is hard and yellow-brown to black in color. Cats can get resorption lesions, which appear to be like cavities, but are slightly different in nature. Fractures are treated by extraction or root canals. Resorption lesions require extraction. Tartar and calculus are removed by scaling the teeth.

Tartar and calculus allow bacteria in the mouth to colonize. When these bacteria start to cause inflammation of the gums, this is called gingivitis. Gingivitis is seen as a darkening of the normal pink gum color. It can turn the gums to a red to almost purple color. Gingivitis can lead to periodontal disease, which is when bone begins to become destroyed. When the bone gets destroyed, the roots of the teeth begin to be exposed to the bacteria in the mouth and on the calculus. The teeth can become loose and fall out, or the bacteria can reach the root of the tooth and destroy the tooth from the inside or cause a tooth abscess causing acute or chronic pain. Of course, both of these are bad. What is even worse is that once the bacteria reach the root, they can enter the blood stream and spread systemically causing bacteria to reach the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, and brain. This can cause many diseases, which can lead to sickness and even death. To treat periodontal disease, we clean the teeth, perform periodontal Debridement, and infuse antibiotic impregnated cement into the area. We also use oral antibiotics after and sometimes before cleaning the teeth. If teeth require extraction due to too much root exposure, we will let you know at that time.

Some of you have heard about groomers cleaning teeth without anesthesia. This actually does more harm than good. Never let anyone convince you otherwise. While the calculus on the part of the teeth that you can see is ugly and causes halitosis, it is the part just under the gums that does the damage. This area, which is cleaned by periodontal Debridement, is painful to clean and requires anesthesia. Imagine your dog sitting through a deep cleaning that human periodontists perform. Also, we chart the teeth on all of our cleanings, checking for fractures, deep pockets, and abscesses, which cannot be found without thorough examination. When the teeth are scaled, microfractures are created in the enamel. These need to be polished out. If they are not, then the bacteria can get into these areas and create calculus even faster than before. Also, any dental procedure that is performed without the direct supervision of a veterinarian is illegal. Don't be fooled into performing such a procedure because it is less expensive;



you are doing harm to your pet.

When we perform any dental procedure, we:

- scale and polish the teeth.
- use a periodontal probe to examine all of the teeth and gums. We'll let you know if there are any problems.
- apply a layer of fluoride to help protect the teeth. Dogs and cats vomit if they swallow fluoride; therefore it is not in any pet toothpaste.

How often should your pet's teeth be cleaned? Annually? We do not recommend annual cleaning. We recommend checking your pet's mouth every 6-12 months as part of a general wellness examination. If we feel that your pet needs dental care, we will let you know.

Once your pet's teeth are nice and clean, or you have a young dog with great teeth, what can you do to prevent dental disease? The best thing that you can do is to brush your pet's teeth daily. There are several brands of pet toothpaste and several types of brushes. We recommend the CET brand paste and using a soft-bristled or finger brush. In addition to brushing, you can place your pet on a dental diet. Hills and Eukanuba make very good dental diets. Dry food is much better for the teeth than wet. For dogs, rope toys and Gumabones are great for the teeth. We do not advocate rawhides do to risk of intestinal obstruction. Never give bones either, as they can cause obstruction and break the teeth. With dogs with a history of periodontal disease, we sometimes recommend long-term antibiotics to slow recurrence. We have them on antibiotics for one week out of every month. This is called pulse therapy.

What if my pet has a complex problem with her teeth? Do I have another option besides extraction of the teeth? Yes, upon request or if we feel a problem is too specialized for us to fix, we refer to a veterinary dentist. He specializes in dealing with dental disease and does a wonderful job with fillings, root canals, crown placement, repairing malocclusions, and other highly difficult dental procedures.

If you feel that you pet has early or advanced dental disease, or if you would like to start a good prevention plan, please schedule an appointment and we will help make sure to keep your pet's mouth healthy and help promote a long and healthy life.