

Dental Fact Sheet

Dogs

Puppies develop 28 temporary teeth at about two to three weeks of age. Their 42 permanent teeth emerge at about four months of age. Studies show that by age three, 80 percent of dogs exhibit signs of gum disease (tartar accumulation, reddened gums, and bad breath).

Small breed dogs (toy poodles, shih-tzus, etc.) are more likely than large breed dogs (Golden Retrievers, German Shepherds, Irish Setters) to develop periodontal disease. The teeth of small dogs are often too large for their mouths, forcing the teeth too close.

Cats

Kittens receive 26 temporary teeth at about two to three weeks of age. They develop 30 permanent teeth at about three to four months. Studies show that by age three, about 70 percent of cats show signs of gum disease (tartar accumulation, reddened gums, bad breath).

Cervical line lesions are the most common dental disease of domestic cats. The disease, which is also referred to as neck lesions, was virtually unrecognized until the mid-1970s. Recent studies show that about 28 percent of domestic cats show at least one lesion. The lesions often begin below the gum line, so they can develop undetected. Often, the first sign to the pet owner is a severely inflamed gum around a single tooth. Other signs include bad breath and tooth sensitivity. Pet owners should seek veterinary care if their cats exhibit any of these symptoms.

Actions Steps for Dogs and Cats

Both puppies and kittens should have a dental examination by a veterinarian at two, three, and four months of age, followed by annual examinations. Early dental exams allow the veterinarian to identify dental development problems early when the pet can benefit from early intervention.

All dogs and cats can benefit from a regular home dental care routine that is recommended by a veterinarian. This home care program often will include both regular brushing and a proper diet.

Introduce a brushing program to pets gradually. At first, dip a finger into beef bouillon for dogs or tuna water for cats. Rub the soaked finger gently over the pet's mouth and teeth. Make the initial sessions short and positive. Gradually, introduce gauze over the finger and gently scrub the teeth in a circular motion. Finally, you can introduce a soft toothbrush designed for pets.

Use a sensitive or ultra-soft brush designed for people or a brush designed for pets. Special pet toothbrushes are available from your veterinarian or specialty pet stores. Finger brushes are usually very easy to use and well tolerated by pets.

Do not use toothpaste designed for people because it could upset the animal's stomach. Specially flavored toothpastes designed for pets are available from your veterinarian or specialty pet stores. Dogs like mint flavored paste, cats prefer seafood or poultry.

If your pet will not tolerate a hands-on approach, try an oral rinse or gel instead of brushing. Ask your veterinarian for advice.

Feed a nutritionally balanced diet - avoid table foods. There is now a specially formulated dietary pet food with dental benefits that is available through veterinarians called Prescription Diet T/D. This diet actually reduces the accumulation of plaque and tartar while the pet is eating. Large and small kibbles are available.

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