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DENTAL DISEASE AND YOUR PET

- Dental disease is the most common disease affecting our pet dogs and cats.
- Up to 85% of pets are afflicted by some level of dental disease by 3 years of age.
- The disease follows a typical course:

Plaque is an invisible “slime” layer consisting of microscopic food particles, bacteria and salivary secretions which coats the teeth.

Tartar is a concretion of this material and may form after 3-5 days of initial plaque deposition. This is the brown, foul smelling material we see on many pets’ teeth. Bad “doggy” breath is an indicator of tartar buildup.

Gingivitis is literally inflammation of the gums – as tartar builds up, the gum line becomes irritated and inflamed resulting in pain for your pet. Tartar can work its way between the tooth roots and the gum, resulting in erosion of the gum. This condition is painful.

Periodontal disease is an extension of gingivitis – it involves deeper structures such as teeth roots, dental ligaments and bone. This results in weakening of the support for teeth and eventual loss of teeth. This condition is irreversible and painful

Systemic disease is a risk for all categories of dental disease because inflammation of the gum allows nasty bacteria from tartar to enter the blood stream. As a result, diseases such as bacterial infections of the heart, kidney and liver may occur. This can be life threatening.

- **Prevention** is always better than a cure!! Always feed dry foods to abrade teeth and give bones and chew toys to prevent tartar formation.
- A **Dental Examination**, conducted at least once a year by your veterinarian will assess the level of dental disease in your pet. Dental disease is graded (grades 1-4) according to the level of dental disease – the vet will let you know what stage your pet is at.
- It is ***much cheaper and more pleasant for your pet to treat dental disease early*** rather than removing lots of tartar and extracting teeth.
- For all grades of dental disease, your vet may recommend a dental prophylaxis, or a ***dental prophylaxis***, to clean all the teeth and oral cavity. This involves a general anaesthetic, cleaning the mouth with antiseptics, ultrasonic scaling and polishing of the teeth (like at the dentist) and possibly antibiotic and fluid therapy – your vet will let you know.
- For more severe dental disease, your vet may need to remove teeth due to irreversible destruction of the gum lining and tooth root. Often, the number of teeth to be removed is only known once your pet is under a GA and tartar is removed from the teeth.
- The vet may recommend prescription diets to prevent the reaccumulation of tartar and recurrence of dental disease in the future.
- Dental disease is common but is ***preventable***.
- It is ***cheaper*** to treat the disease early rather than much later...your pet will thank you!!
- ***Regular examination*** at least every 12 months by your vet is necessary to check your pet’s oral health status.