

# Dental Disease

## – is your pet affected?

**WOW!**  
**FREE Dental**  
**Check in September!**

### White Smile Month 2011!



For the whole month of **September** we are offering free oral assessments and advice on how to care for your pets' teeth. We can advise you on how to maintain good oral health through diet, tooth brushing, the use of mouth rinses and gels. We have free samples and special offers on dental diets and oral care products.

Let us help you to check out your pet's dental health!

### September FREE Dental Check!

**PLUS... FREE SAMPLES**  
and **SPECIAL OFFERS ON**  
**DENTAL PRODUCTS** – just  
bring this voucher with you  
for your discount. Offer ends  
30.9.11



Photo: © iStockPhoto.com

## Dental Disease in Cats and Dogs



Did you know that tooth and gum problems in dogs and cats are very common, with 85% of pets over 3 years of age suffering from some degree of dental disease, causing ill health and pain?

As your pet eats, food particles will naturally accumulate on and between

tooth surfaces. The pet's mouth is naturally heavily contaminated with bacteria. Bacteria in the mouth digest the food particles to form plaque, which is the sticky yellow film seen on the teeth. The bacteria that form this plaque build up and cause *inflammation* and *infection* of the gums known as **gingivitis** (Figure 2); this is often seen as a red line along the teeth and is the first sign of what is called 'periodontal disease'.

In time the plaque thickens, becomes mineralised and forms a hard yellowish/brown layer known as calculus or tartar. The calculus holds the infection to the tooth surface and helps push bacteria and debris under the gum line. The bacteria change in nature and burrow deep into the tooth socket causing infection which, when severe, can be seen as an abscess with pus exuding from the junction between the tooth and the gum, and may also be seen as swelling of the face, resulting, ultimately, in loss of the tooth, often preceded by months of pain. This is far more serious than gingivitis and is termed **periodontitis** (Figure 3).

Bad breath, drooling or licking are often the first signs of dental disease. Inflamed, red gums with bleeding or tartar build up are seen on oral exam. Many pets just seem a bit 'under the weather' or withdrawn, due to the chronic infection and discomfort associated with dental disease. Cats also have a particular tendency to develop resorptive lesions (holes) in their teeth due to decay, and the resulting exposure of the nerves in the tooth root is extremely painful (Figure 4).



The problems don't just finish in the mouth. The gum tissue has an extensive blood supply. When periodontal disease starts, bacteria get into your pet's circulation and can set up infection in many organs, including the heart and kidneys. Kidney infection and damage results, and in the heart cauliflower-like growths develop on the valves, which often improve dramatically following dental treatment. A similar process occurs in people with dental disease.

Most importantly bad teeth and gums are intensely painful, as any of you who have suffered tooth ache and gingivitis will know. Did you know that toothache was the most common cause of suicide in Victorian times?

### Gum Disease: the good, the bad and the ugly!



**Fig 1 – Healthy mouth** with bright white teeth and healthy pink or pigmented gums



**Fig 2 – Gingivitis** with inflamed reddened gum margins



**Fig 3 – Periodontitis** with accumulation of calculus and destruction of the tooth supporting structures

### Tooth resorptive lesions are only found in cats



**Fig 4 – Typical lesion.** The tooth is progressively destroyed

/continued overleaf.....

## Dental Disease in Cats and Dogs – continued....

**Dental treatment** involves the removal of all dental plaque and tartar build-up in the mouth, from the crowns and also below the gum margins where they are actively invading the socket. This is all done under general anaesthetic, which is carefully monitored by a veterinary nurse while the vet works on the mouth. Once the mouth is clean it is sometimes necessary to x-ray to give us more information about tooth roots and jaw bones. Any badly diseased teeth are removed with great care and the gums are stitched up. Effective pain relief is of course given before and after dental procedures.

In addition we always follow up dental treatment with support for aftercare at home. Most pets will tolerate and even enjoy having their teeth brushed (although some cats can be a bit tricky!) and for those who don't, we have excellent, pet friendly, antiseptic oral gels and rinses. Our veterinary nurses are really good at helping you learn to use the dental kit.

It is amazing the effect that dental treatment can have on your pet; they can shed years!

**Following your pet's scale and polish, home dental care is really important!** Tooth brushing using a specially formulated pet tooth paste, together with appropriate diets and other forms of oral care can make a huge difference. The tooth photo (far right) with very healthy teeth and gums, is from a dog that has his teeth brushed on a *regular* basis!



### Tooth cleaning – the scale and polish



Ultrasonic scalers provide very effective tooth cleaning



Under a general anaesthetic an ultrasonic scaler removes all the plaque and calculus. Following this the teeth are then polished to restore their smooth surface.

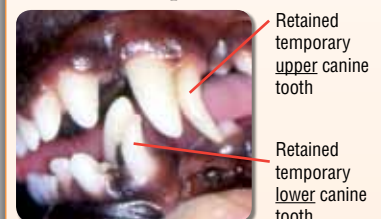


## Too many teeth can be a problem!



We go to great efforts to ensure that your pets have a healthy mouth, but did you know that there are times when a pet can have *too many* teeth!

Puppies and kittens start to lose their temporary (or "milk") teeth at about 12 weeks of age and this process is usually completed by about 6 months of age. As the temporaries are lost, so this leaves room for the adult teeth to emerge. However, it is not uncommon, particularly in the smaller breeds of dog, for one or more of the temporary teeth (frequently the canine teeth) to be *retained* – see photo below.



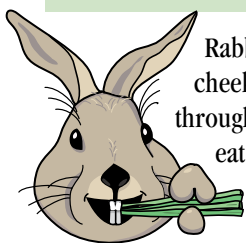
Retained temporary upper canine tooth

Retained temporary lower canine tooth

Food may be trapped between temporary and permanent teeth – leading to gingivitis, and additionally, the retained temporary tooth may cause its adult counterpart to erupt in the *wrong direction*.

However, with **regular health examinations**, it is problems like this that can be picked up at an *early stage* and – in this case remedied, by extracting the retained temporary teeth. Please contact us if you would like any further information.

## Rabbit teeth – time for a check-up?



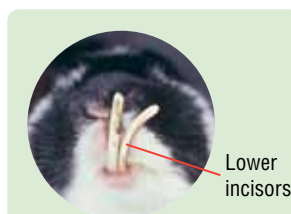
Rabbits have 4 incisor teeth at the front and 22 cheek teeth at the back. These grow continuously throughout their lives as rabbits have evolved to eat large amounts of low quality fibrous foods which wear down the enamel. Dental disease is the most common problem which

veterinary surgeons see in domestic rabbits because most pet rabbits are fed too much good quality food which doesn't wear their teeth down.

When a rabbit's teeth become overgrown they push into the cheeks and tongue causing painful ulcers, and the roots push up causing dental abscesses. Once dental disease has started, although treatable, it will progress and get worse with time. Therefore it is very important to feed your rabbit correctly to prevent (and treat) dental disease.

From weaning (at 5 weeks of age) rabbits should be fed on mainly grass or meadow hay. As a supplement 3-6 tablespoons of rabbit food can be offered, but this must be pellets that look like brown sticks, made from compressed grass. Avoid mixed cereal and pulse diets. You can offer small amounts of green leafy vegetables daily but steer clear of fruit.

Symptoms of dental disease in rabbits include depression, a preference for soft food, not eating as much as normal, weight loss, watery eyes, wet chin, dirty bottom, and grinding the teeth. If you are concerned about your rabbit's dental health then you need to see your vet. Dental treatment involves careful filing down of the molars or incisors, and extensive dentistry obviously requires safe anaesthesia, with which our vets and nurses have much experience. Afterwards your rabbit will need pain relief, antibiotics and correction of the diet. Remember, prevention is better than cure!



Misaligned and overgrown lower incisor teeth.



Overgrown cheek teeth (arrowed) are sharp and lacerate the gums.

**FREE Dental Check in September!**

See front page for further details and Voucher!