

Oral Disease Most Frequent Diagnosis in Veterinary Clinics

Oral disease is the most frequently diagnosed disease in cats and dogs entering veterinary clinics, according to the preliminary findings of a nationwide study conducted by the University of Minnesota on veterinary clinics nationwide.

"Dental disease is a problem that many pet owners unknowingly overlook," said Dr. Robert Wiggs, past president of the American Veterinary Dental Society (AVDS). "The University of Minnesota study proves that a lot of dogs and cats have dental disease that should be treated."

"Studies show that 70 percent of cats and 80 percent of dogs show signs of gum disease by age three," said Dr. Wiggs. "Fortunately, there is something pet owners can do about it."

The AVDS recommends a three-step program to help prevent oral disease:

1. **Take Your Pet to Your Veterinarian.** Your family veterinarian is also your pet's dentist. He or she will do a health checkup that includes a thorough physical exam and a dental check. If plaque and tartar buildup are a problem, your veterinarian will probably recommend a dental cleaning.
2. **Start a Home Dental Care Routine.** Your veterinarian will suggest steps you can take at home to help keep your pet's teeth clean. This could include regular brushing and a special pet food with dental benefits.

3. **Get Regular Veterinary Checkups.** Follow up is important because plaque continues to build up on your pet's teeth every day. Some pets tend to accumulate plaque and tartar more quickly. Tooth brushing and regular dental cleanings are especially important for these pets.

Most pet owners think of their pets as their children. You wouldn't let your child go a year without brushing or seeing a dentist, so don't neglect your pet's teeth. Research shows that untreated dental disease can cause painful inflammation, tooth loss and possibly systemic diseases.

"While gum disease is the most common infectious disease in the world for cats and dogs, we believe this disease can be controlled or even possibly eliminated with proper treatment by veterinarians combined with home care by pet owners," said Dr. Wiggs.

The American Veterinary Dental Society celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1996. More than 1,000 veterinarians in more than 20 countries belong to the AVDS, making it one of the largest veterinary organizations in the world. The society's headquarters is in Boise, Idaho.*

Cat Dental Fact Sheet

Kittens have 26 temporary teeth that begin to erupt at about two to three weeks of age. They have 30 permanent teeth that emerge at about three to four months.

Studies show that 70 percent of cats show signs of gum disease by age three. Symptoms include yellow and brown buildup of tartar along the gumline, red inflamed gums and persistent bad breath.

Approximately 33 percent of all Americans own at least one cat, accounting for 65 million pet cats, according to the Pet Food Institute.

Feline dental resorption, commonly called cervical line lesions, are the most common dental disease of domestic cats. The disease was virtually unrecognized until the mid-1970s. Recent studies show about 28 percent of domestic cats show at least one lesion. The lesions often begin below the gumline, so they can develop undetected. Often, the first sign to the pet owner is a severely inflamed gum around a tooth. Cat owners should seek veterinary care if their cats exhibit pain or inflammation around the gums.*

How To Brush Your Pet's Teeth

Introduce a brushing program to pets gradually. At first, dip a finger into tuna water for cats and beef bouillon for dogs. 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 scrub the teeth in a circular motion.

Once you've acclimated the pet, you can use an ultra-soft toothbrush designed for pets, available from veterinarians or at specialty pet stores. Toothbrushes come in a variety of sizes: extra-small size for cats, larger sizes for dogs. There are also finger toothbrushes available, which may allow greater control for the novice brusher.

Don't use toothpaste designed for people; it could upset your pet's stomach. Toothpaste specially formulated for cats and dogs is available from veterinarians or at specialty pet stores.

Avoid over-restraining your pet and keep brushing sessions short and positive. Cats and small dogs can be held in your lap. Praise and reassure the pet throughout the process.

Brush using the circular motion where the tooth and gum meet. Smaller teeth may be harder to brush, so a piece of soft gauze wrapped around a finger or a cotton swab can be used to massage the tooth-gum interface.*