

Vet's Corner – Dental Problems

Dogs teeth are used as we use our hands. They use them for a range of activities other than just eating, eg, carrying, fetching and holding. Imagine trying to do all your daily chores with swollen infected hands.

Often we overlook the dental health of our pets and they can be coping with painful, infected mouths. We all know the pain associated with toothache and how debilitating it can be, and a significant number of hounds seen by us as part of the GAP program have varying stages of periodontal disease.

Periodontal Disease

Periodontal Disease (PD) is a painful inflammatory condition involving bacteria attacking the gums, ligaments and bony tissue which surround and support animal teeth. It is a progressive disease, which means it will become worse if left untreated. Checking your dog's mouth regularly at health checks is very important.

The early stage of PD – gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) – is reversible. Left untreated, gingivitis leads to irreversible periodontitis (severe infection involving the bone) which leads to early tooth loss. PD is not controlled by any one 'thing' and a combination of home and veterinary care is needed.

Things that you can do:

- Brushing teeth (not always easy).
- Dental diet (special diets available).
- Dental chews (good dental exercise).
- Bones.
- Chew toys.

Veterinary care includes:

- Check teeth at health visits.
- Professional cleaning (scale & polish to remove plaque).
- Vet may prescribe antibiotics for infection.
- A new vaccine which is available to help against some of the bacteria incriminated in causing the decay. (Ask your vet).

PD is more common in small breeds and brachycephalic breeds (squashed face), and in dogs fed a diet of soft food. It also increases with age and it is apparent many racing greyhounds are fed soft foods, so don't get the dental exercise to help keep teeth clean.

Dental scaling and cleaning is often carried out at the neutering visit, but we encourage you to get your vet to check your dog's mouth at every visit. Halitosis is one of the signs of poor mouths. If your dog's breath stinks, look at its teeth and gums. Dogs and cats still manage to eat



Top: Nasty teeth – showing definite signs of periodontal disease

Bottom: Nice teeth – clean and healthy teeth and gums

surprisingly well when they have 'manky' teeth. But think how much better they will feel with a healthy mouth and shiny teeth. So get brushing!

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Note from Christine: Having spent over \$450 at our wonderful vet to get two molars removed, scaling and cleaning of remaining teeth, not to mention stress to 'Dear Rosie' (and myself!) at going under anaesthetic at nearly 11, regular check-ups are a MUST if your dog has troublesome teeth!

Useful chew items: pigs ears, dental sticks, chicken carcass.

