

THE IMPORTANCE OF DENTAL HYGIENE TO THE HEALTH OF YOUR DOG

We all appreciate the importance of dental hygiene in maintaining the health of our teeth and gums. Quite apart from anything else, it is not very pleasant to be in the general vicinity of someone who doesn't brush their teeth. Well, your dog is no different. He or she needs to have his or her teeth brushed regularly to avoid gum disease and to remain a pleasure to be around. Unfortunately, unlike humans, dogs can't look after their own

by brushing your dog's teeth on a regular basis while paying attention to diet. Brushing is an effective way of mechanically removing plaque, while a suitable diet can reduce the accumulation of plaque. Feeding your dog soft or sticky foods on a continual basis should be avoided and should be interspersed with feeding harder crunchier food. The chewing action required to break down harder foodstuffs has a cleansing effect on the

It is important to treat and control periodontal disease for two reasons:

- To maintain the teeth and gums in a healthy state

- To guard against infection spreading to other parts of the body

teeth and so they rely on you to help them out in this regard. Even with regular brushing, it is necessary to have your teeth cleaned (scaled and polished) from time to time. Your dentist looks after this for you probably about once a year. For your dog, your veterinarian is qualified to fill this role. The procedure is common place today in most veterinary practices and in combination with brushing your dog's teeth on a regular basis, will help prevent the development of one of the most common diseases in dogs: periodontal disease.

"Periodontal" comes from two Greek words that mean "around the tooth." Periodontal disease is started by germs present in plaque which attack the gums, bone and ligaments that support the teeth and hold them in the jaw. Most dogs suffer from this disease to some extent. Signs include halitosis (bad breath) and difficulty in eating or chewing. In some cases your dog may become listless or lethargic. It is a progressive disease which usually starts out as gingivitis, an infection affecting the gum tissue. At this point the disease is still reversible with adequate oral hygiene. However, if the disease is not treated, it may progress to the moderate stage. Moderate disease is characterized by gums, bone and other structures that support the teeth becoming damaged. Advanced periodontal disease results in severe gum recession with the loss of supporting bone and subsequent loss of teeth. A further complication of periodontal disease is that the bacteria involved in causing the disease can enter the bloodstream and travel to other parts of the body (kidneys, liver, heart) causing secondary infection. The first step in preventing periodontal disease is maintaining good oral health for your dog. This can be accomplished

teeth. While brushing and diet play a major part in the maintenance of good oral health, it is still necessary to have your dog's teeth cleaned on a regular basis by your veterinarian to remove hard-to-get-at plaque and tartar.

The bacteria that cause periodontal disease attack the gums and erode the tissue that supports the teeth and keeps them in a healthy state. The more severe the disease, the more tissue that is likely to have been destroyed. Without supportive tissue, the tooth will eventually fall out or have to be removed. It is possible to arrest the effects of the disease by removing the bacteria that cause the disease. However, these bacteria frequently reside beneath the gumline and cannot be removed by brushing alone. It may be necessary from time to time for your veterinarian to clean beneath the gumline to treat this problem. There is now a product available that is used in conjunction with this cleaning procedure to help decrease the number of harmful bacteria that cause periodontal disease. This allows the gums and supporting structures to return to a healthier state. The combination of home-care and regular visits to the veterinarian will help control the build-up of plaque and harmful bacteria, contributing to successful treatment of periodontal disease. If you have any concerns about your dog's dental health, ask your veterinarian's advice or call today for a check-up appointment. Remember, the early stages of dental disease are more easily treated than the advanced stages, with better long term results.



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