

Proper dental care is one of the most important ways to protect our pets from pain, infection, and illness. Many of the diseases affecting cats and dogs can be traced back to bacteria growing on the surface of the tooth. Bacteria on the teeth cause redness and infection of the surrounding gums and also infection of the bones of the upper and lower jaw. From there, the bacteria enter the bloodstream and cause damage throughout the entire body. The result is pain, decreased quality of life, and a shorter life span. The good news is that we can keep the bacteria under control and prevent all of this from happening. A commitment to proactive and preventive oral care helps pets live longer, happier, and healthier lives.



Dental Cleaning

No different from humans, the primary way to keep cat and dog teeth healthy is through regular dental cleanings. As soon as their adult teeth are in (by 6 months for puppies and kittens), pets have bacteria on the surface of their teeth that continue to grow and eventually cause a brown-yellow-black buildup of minerals on the teeth called tartar (visible in the “before” photo above). Where the tartar meets the gums is where infections of the gums and bone begin, starting the painful cycle of tooth damage and loss.

We recommend yearly dental cleanings for most pets, but we’ll check each time we see your cat or dog and let you know. Some can go longer between cleanings, and some need it more frequently. Dental cleanings with anesthesia are a regular part of our wellness care for pets, and it is one of the four most important things you can do to help your pet live a long, healthy and happy life.¹

We believe so strongly in the value of dental cleanings that we have found ways to provide this service in an extremely affordable way. We also take anesthetic procedures seriously and provide them in the safest way possible. Prior to the cleaning, we evaluate the overall health of your pet and address any anesthetic concerns. Once your pet has been approved for anesthesia we can schedule a convenient day to perform the cleaning and any other treatments necessary.



¹ The others are: nutrition; behavioral enrichment and training; and preventive visits and medications

Dental Cleaning Steps

Once your pet is anesthetized, we remove bacteria and tartar from the surface of every tooth, both above and below the gum line. We use the same equipment your dentist uses to keep your teeth clean, with some special modifications for the size and shape of cat and dog teeth. We typically use an ultrasonic scaler to remove tartar and bacteria above the gumline, and a combination of hand scaling and ultrasonic scaling to remove tartar and bacteria under the gumline. We spend a good amount of time under the gumline cleaning and searching for abnormalities because this is where gum and tooth infections cause major issues.

When we are done cleaning, we take x-rays (also called radiographs) of all teeth in the mouth to identify issues under the gumline that are not visible. Humans frequently get cavities in our teeth, and those occur above the gumline where they can be seen and diagnosed by the dentist. Cats and dogs don't get cavities, they get infection and inflammation primarily below the gumline. That's why x-rays are so helpful during dental cleanings.

If we find abnormalities like an infected tooth (shown in the dental x-ray on page 1), we take care of the problem. Sometimes that means surgically extracting the tooth (which is what happened in this case). Sometimes we are able to treat the tooth to address the issue and save it. Cats and dogs do very well even if they have all of their teeth extracted, and of course we want to do everything in our power to keep that from happening.

Once we are done with x-rays and treatments, we polish the teeth with a low-speed polisher to insure a smooth tooth surface. This makes it more difficult for bacteria to grow on the surface of the tooth for a short time after the dental cleaning. We then apply a fluoride foam to the teeth to increase enamel strength. After that, we wake our patient up from anesthesia, update the dental chart and medical records, and get everything ready for your pet to head home.

Between Dental Cleanings: Oral Health Products

At home between dental cleanings, there are several things that you can do to improve your pet's dental health and quality of life. Although there is no replacement for dental cleaning, there are some products that are useful.

Depending on the pet, brushing with a pet-safe toothpaste can be challenging. With early training, some cats and dogs will let their owners brush their teeth, and if you can do that, it's great!

There are several other dental health products we recommend that have proven to be successful at reducing bacteria and tartar between dental cleanings. All dental products we recommend have earned the Veterinary Oral Health Council (www.vohc.org) seal of approval. Some of the products we recommend are listed below:

- Purina DH (Dental Health) Diet
- CEVA Rawhide Chews
- CEVA Oral Health Flakes
- CEVA Water Additive
- Greenies Dental Treats