



Veterinary Dental Services, LLC

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Dental Care for Cats

Your kitty is at risk for the same oral disease as you, which is preventable with proper home care and routine professional cleanings under anesthesia. There is no reason to believe that your pet does not feel the same pain of sore gums and a toothache that people feel. The main reason to care for your cat's teeth is to prevent tooth loss, pain and infection.

Plaque is a tan, thick substance consisting of saliva, bacteria and food particles. In fact plaque is 80% bacteria and forms within 6-8 hours after brushing. Plaque sticks to the teeth and collects below the gumline around the teeth. If left in place, plaque leads to gingivitis, and potentially gum recession and bone loss. Without bone and gum tissue to support the tooth, the tooth will eventually be lost. This same process can happen in our mouths, but we brush 2-3 times a day to remove plaque before it causes a problem.

Calculus, otherwise known as tartar, is typically brownish-yellow and is formed when plaque accumulates and mineralizes into multiple layers on the teeth. Plaque becomes tartar in 2-3 days. Once formed, calculus cannot be removed with tooth brushing alone and requires professional scaling by your veterinarian. Furthermore, plaque loves to stick to the rough surface of tartar. Heavy tartar build up creates new environments in which the most destructive bacteria thrive.

Signs of Gingivitis and Periodontal Disease

- Bad Breath
- Drooling
- Swollen or red gums that may bleed
- Receded gums
- Loose or missing teeth
- Difficulty chewing or eating
- Reluctance to play with toys
- Vomiting unchewed food
- Calculus (tartar) on teeth

How to Care for your Cat's Teeth

We encourage you to brush your cat's teeth every day. If you are unable to brush daily, once every other day is acceptable, but anything less than that is not effective. Plaque will harden into tartar within 48 hours of not brushing and tartar does not come off with a toothbrush.

Here at Veterinary Dental Services, LLC, we realize that cats can be difficult to handle and medicate at home, never mind trying to brush their teeth. Most cats will learn to tolerate tooth brushing, a few will actually enjoy it, and some just will not allow it. Cats can take a long time to become accepting of tooth brushing, sometimes even months, so it is a big commitment on your part but don't become frustrated. Below are steps on how to train your cat to tolerate tooth brushing. Some cats can move through these steps weekly, others take two or three weeks for each step. Remember, the goal is for long term success and acceptance, so don't rush your cat.

Step One

Place your cat on a counter top everyday at the same time. Start by simply rubbing and petting his or her face while giving praise. Do this for 30 to 60 seconds and immediately follow with a reward. Rewards can be treats, a meal, brushing or even a toy; whatever is rewarding for your cat.

Step Two

Now you can begin to introduce the toothbrush and toothpaste. Start by just holding the toothbrush in your hand while you continue to do everything in step one. You have probably noticed that cats love to rub the side of their face on things and you can actually brush the side of their face with the tooth brush. Many cats enjoy it. You can also introduce the toothpaste by placing a small amount on a treat that he or she likes, or even putting it on their paw for them to lick off. Again be sure to praise throughout and to follow with a reward.

Step Three

Now you can begin to hold your cat's head in the manner that you would if you were going to give him or her medicine. (See picture below.) You will only see just the tips of the teeth, which is fine. Brush one side, even though you can't see the teeth very well. Next tilt the head towards you and brush the opposite side. Then, finally brush the teeth in the front of the mouth. There is no wrong way to brush, but this system seems to work best for most people.



Remember to never use human toothpaste, baking soda or hydrogen peroxide, as these are unsafe for animals to swallow. Always use toothpaste labeled for pets. We would be happy to make recommendations for you.

It is important to do this daily as it helps to build it into your pet's routine, and also yours. Brushing just once or twice a week does not remove plaque often enough to prevent gingivitis and periodontal disease. Once both you and your cat have become accustomed to the process it will only take one minute out of your day. Try to have fun!