

Frequently Asked Dental Questions (and Answers)

Why should I brush my pet's teeth? Daily removal of plaque is the key to an effective oral hygiene program. Unless your pet's teeth are brushed daily, **plaque, which is an accumulation of bacteria**, will build up at the gum-line. Eventually, calculus forms, further irritating the gums – causing infection that progresses to destroy the attachment around your pet's teeth. In addition to creating loose teeth, **infection under the gum-line can spread to the liver, kidneys and heart.**

How can I brush my pet's teeth? It is usually a very easy procedure. First, pick a soft-bristled or finger toothbrush. Next, get toothpaste from your veterinarian. *Do not use toothpaste intended for humans because it has detergents that should not be swallowed.* Apply a small amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush and brush the outside of the upper cheek teeth. Concentrate on the area where the tooth meets the gum line.

How often does my pet need to have his/her teeth cleaned by the veterinarian? It depends on the degree of plaque and tartar accumulation. Examine your pet's teeth monthly. Look for an accumulation of yellow or brown material at the area where the tooth meets the gum-line – pay particular attention to the cheek teeth and canines.

Once you notice plaque and tartar accumulation, it is time for a professional cleaning. *Do not wait.* **Bacteria is attached to the tartar and is irritating the gum tissues.** When treated, inflammation will be resolved. **When gingivitis is left untreated, it will progress to periodontitis, which is nonreversible.**

The intervals between teeth-cleaning procedures will depend on how often you brush your pet's teeth. *Once or twice daily is optimal.* If you cannot brush your pet's teeth, then you will probably need two or three professional teeth-cleaning visits a year.

Can I just take my fingernail or dental-scaler to remove the calculus? Dental disease occurs *below the gum line.* By removing calculus from the visible part of the tooth, you are *not removing disease below the gum line.* In order to help your pet, plaque and calculus must be professionally removed from below the gum-line.

Do you have to use anesthetics to clean my pet's teeth?

Anesthesia is necessary when performing teeth cleaning. Anesthesia provides three important functions:
1) immobilization in order to clean below the gum line,
2) pain control and 3) the ability to place a tube into the windpipe *so bacterial products do not enter the respiratory system.*

I am anxious about anesthesia. Is it safe? Anesthesia is very safe and far less dangerous than the periodontal disease that will develop without proper cleanings. Your pet's health is our number one priority! **Bloodwork** is mandatory for all our dental patients - this helps us evaluate your pet's internal organ functions and allows us to better know if your pet is healthy enough to go under anesthesia.

Your pet is **always closely monitored** when they are under anesthesia. This means one of our trained veterinary technicians closely monitors your pet's blood pressure, blood oxygen saturation, electrocardiogram, respiratory rate and body temperature. Intravenous fluids are also administered throughout the procedure to help maintain your pet's blood pressure and provide intravenous access for additional drugs if needed. Additionally, your pet is always kept warm with warming blankets during the procedure.

What's involved in a teeth-cleaning procedure at

FloridaWild? For each professional teeth-cleaning, 12 separate procedures are performed: **1)** A general examination before anesthesia (evaluating the bite, preoperative organ testing, identification of abnormal wear patterns, gum infections and raw cancer) **2)** An oral anesthetic examination of each tooth **3)** Calculus removal from the visible part of the teeth **4)** Sub-gingival (below-the-gum-line) scaling, root planning, and curettage where indicated **5)** Teeth polishing **6)** Irrigation **7)** A post-cleaning exam and full mouth radiographs **8)** Dental charting to keep a record of abnormalities **9)** Therapy if necessary **10)** Home-care instructions **11)** A no-fee follow-up appointment and periodic rechecks to see how well you are performing home care

How much does a tooth-cleaning procedure cost? It is impossible to quote what the procedure will cost because we do not know what state your pet's teeth and gums are in.

There are four levels of teeth cleanings at our hospital. The range of fees is based on the severity plus fees for preoperative testing, anesthesia, necessary therapy and medication. The doctor or technician will be happy to give you an estimate once you bring your cat or dog in for an examination.

What is best to feed my pet? *Whole foods are always best to feed our pets.* It is a myth that dry foods help clean teeth; it's like saying eating pretzels cleans your teeth. However, there are products that can help keep your pet's teeth plaque free such as Oravet chews, NZ velvet spray, Perio Support and pet-specific toothpaste. *Diet alone will not control plaque, but it can greatly help.*

What toys should I avoid to protect my pet's teeth?

Chewing on objects harder than the tooth may lead to dental fractures. Be especially careful with cow and horse hooves. They commonly cause fractures to the upper cheek tooth. Do not play tug-of-war games, especially with young dogs and cats, because they can move growing teeth to abnormal locations. Throwing hard Frisbees can also cause trauma to teeth resulting in pupitis (an inflammation of the pulp).

What are cat cavities? Many cats get painful lesions at the gum lines that invade their teeth. These lesions are referred to as feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions (FORLs).

Unfortunately, we do not know what causes FORLs, and the most effective treatment involves extraction of the affected tooth. Check to see if your cat has FORLs by placing a cotton-tipped application to the gum line and pressing. If there is a painful lesion, your cat will chatter its jaw – this must be treated.

How can I tell if my pet is suffering from periodontal disease? The leading sign is bad breath. *Cats and dogs*

should not have a disagreeable mouth odor. Bad breath comes from infection. If your pet's breath does not smell like roses, let us examine their mouth and advise care.

What types of tests are done to diagnose dental disease?

If periodontal disease is present or if your pet has a fractured tooth, an oral exam is performed while your pet is under anesthesia. A periodontal probe is used to evaluate bone loss around each tooth. Radiographs are taken to evaluate if teeth can be saved or need to be extracted.

When do I have to start worrying about dental problems with my pet?

As soon as puppy or kitten teeth emerge, it's time to start brushing. Although baby teeth are replaced with adult teeth, the puppy or kitten gets used to the brushing procedure, which continues for life.

What can be done if my pet has periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease occurs when tooth support structures are affected by infection. In the beginning stages, cleaning above and below the gum line, as well as removal of the calculus attached to the tooth, will help restore periodontal health. In advanced cases, either periodontal surgery or extractions are performed. Antibiotics are also given to help control the progression for periodontal disease.

Which animals are most at risk for periodontal disease?

Smaller breeds are more prone than larger because their teeth are closer together - and these dogs usually live longer. Terriers, Maltese, and Shih Tzus are especially prone to periodontal disease.

What can you do to fix a broken tooth? If your dog or cat breaks a tooth, there are two treatments; root canal therapy to save the tooth or extraction. Leaving the tooth alone with an exposed nerve is not a humane option. In addition to pain, infection will develop, which can spread to vital organs.

