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DENTAL HYGIENE

Cats and dogs seldom develop tooth cavities, as do humans. However the dog and cat are not without a major dental problem! In fact, the most common dental problem that we find in pets is considered far worse than cavities! It is called **PERIODONTAL DISEASE**. This disease affects the gums and other tissues around the teeth, instead of the teeth themselves.

About 75% of all dental problems serious enough to be seen by a veterinarian, and almost all teeth that are lost, are the result of periodontal disease. It is the cause of 95% of all cases of bad breath. In advanced cases, it results in infected, foul-smelling, loosened teeth; with a massive, unsightly accumulation of tartar. Often there is a loss of appetite due to painful gums. Even signs such as diarrhea, vomiting and irritability may be the result of this disease.

Food material, bacteria, and saliva accumulate and adhere to the tooth surface, forming a soft plaque. This material can be easily removed at this point. However, if buildup is allowed to continue, it becomes hard and chalk-like from its mineral content. The tartar buildup causes erosion of the gums, with subsequent inflammation and infection of the tooth socket. The teeth then become loose, and may even fall out. The gums become reddened, swollen, and bleed easily. The dog often salivates excessively from the associated pain.

The buildup of this material allows bacteria to constantly grow in the infected mouth tissue. These bacteria may enter the bloodstream through the bleeding gums; and cause such problems as: heart valve infections (endocarditis) and kidney infections (nephritis).

Rapid buildup of tartar is primarily due to the acidity of the saliva--not to what the dog eats! The more acid the saliva--the quicker the buildup of plaque.

Follow these tips for good oral hygiene:

Feed at least some hard food, which will provide a cleaning action. IVD Dental Formula is available at many veterinary clinics and is designed to help prevent tartar build-up when fed as a regular diet for dogs. Friskies now has an adult cat food available at the grocery store to help keep teeth clean. Greenies are a good chewtoy/ treat that also helps slow tartar build-up.

Have teeth examined at least once every year for tartar buildup. Pets vary considerably in the amount of tartar that accumulates.

Brush your pet's teeth on a regular basis. Human toothpaste should not be used since it can be toxic if swallowed by your pet. Pet toothpaste is available. Your veterinarian will be happy to recommend what is best for your pet.

These recommendations will probably do more to prolong your dog's life and make it more enjoyable than anything else you can do!