



## DENTAL DISEASE IN DOGS & CATS



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When people have bad breath, we offer them a mint or tic-tac. Unfortunately, when our pets do, they come kiss us with that horrible breath. We just let them and tell them how stinky they are. What people don't realize is that the smell is actually bad periodontal disease and it's preventable with the right home care for your pets' dental hygiene. Periodontal disease begins when plaque sticks to the surface of the teeth, hardens, and becomes tartar. The tartar above the gum lines is what people typically see, but that's not the cause of actual disease. As bacteria starts to develop under the gum line, inflammation causes a reddening of the gums which ultimately causes loss of bone and tissue around the teeth. If the gums and teeth are not treated, severe buildup of plaque and tartar occur and can get into the bloodstream. This can cause heart, kidney, and liver disease.

When we go to the dentist, we sit in the chair and keep our mouths open for the dentist to clean our teeth. Since pets are not able to do this, we need to place them under general anesthesia so that we can appropriately clean their teeth. We need to be able to scale and polish their teeth above and below the gum line. It is not recommended to do a dental scaling without anesthesia. Once the dental tartar is removed from the teeth, we can better evaluate the gums and take dental radiographs if needed. This helps us to visualize the tooth roots and determine if any extractions are necessary.



It is important to take care of your pets' teeth at home to keep them happy and comfortable. There are many different methods to do this. The most effective way to maintain oral health is to brush their teeth with pet friendly toothpaste. Be sure not to use human toothpaste, as it can upset their stomach. Other methods that can be used are chlorhexidine rinses or gels. Chlorhexidine is an anti-plaque antiseptic that is used to clean the surface of the teeth and gums. There are many other products such as dental diets and dental chews like CET chews. A complete list of products that have been approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) can be found at [www.VOCH.org](http://www.VOCH.org). Click on the link that says products awarded the VOHC seal. February is National Pet Dental Month. Make sure to schedule an appointment for your pet to have their teeth evaluated to determine if a dental is needed to keep them healthy.