



COUNCIL BLUFFS VETERINARY CLINIC

1229 South 3rd Street  
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503

(712) 323-2147

[www.cbvetclinic.com](http://www.cbvetclinic.com)

## Dental Health for Dogs and Cats

### Dental facts:

- Oral disease is seen in 80% of dogs and 70% of cats by the time they are 3 years old.<sup>1</sup>
- Oral disease can lead to tooth decay and loss, bleeding gums, and damage to other organs (i.e., heart, kidneys, liver).<sup>1</sup>
- February is National Pet Dental Month

Oral disease starts with the buildup of bacteria in the mouth. The bacteria form colonies on the teeth leading to the production of plaque. The bacteria can cause pits to form in the tooth enamel leading to cavities (rare in dogs). Tartar (calculus) then forms on the surface of the tooth and appears yellow to brown. Gingivitis and periodontitis will occur.

### Signs of oral disease:<sup>2</sup>

- Bad breath (halitosis)
- Drooling (ptyalism)
- Poor appetite – difficulty with chewing/eating
- Swollen, red, or bleeding gums
- Vomiting
- Loose or missing teeth
- Yellow to brown tartar on teeth
- Pawing at the face

If you notice any of the above signs of oral disease please have your pet's mouth examined by your veterinarian so that he/she can assess the severity of disease and recommend a treatment protocol.

Treatment for oral disease may consist of a thorough cleaning of your pet's teeth. This is done under general anesthesia and encompasses many of the same procedures that are done in human dentistry. Tartar and plaque are scraped off of the teeth. Then the teeth are polished to remove all of the irregularities (pits) on the surface. Your pet's mouth is checked for the presence of decaying or loose teeth and tooth root abscesses; these teeth are removed and abscesses are drained. If your pet suffers from periodontitis or gingivitis then antibiotics will often be included in the treatment.

**Prevention:**

- **Note:** consult with your veterinarian about acceptable oral disease prevention products available for your pet before purchase. Visit Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) at [vohc.org](http://vohc.org) for list of approved products for dogs and cats.
- Brush your pet's teeth on a daily basis. This is the best method to prevent oral disease. Daily brushing will remove plaque from your pet's teeth. Once tartar has begun to form then dental cleaning by your veterinarian will be needed. For tips on brushing your pet's teeth go to <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?cls=1&cat=1390&articleid=383> (substitute tuna water with beef broth for dogs). Do not use human toothpaste on your pet.
- Supplement (in addition to) teeth brushing with dental rinses, chews, and/or treats specially formulated for pets.
- Feeding hard (dry) food has a beneficial affect on reducing plaque buildup in your pet's mouth.

**Definitions:**

- Plaque – first to form on the tooth enamel and consists of a mixed population of bacteria, salivary polymers, white blood cells, and sloughed epithelial cells.<sup>2</sup>
- Calculus (tartar) – calcium carbonate and calcium phosphate.<sup>2</sup>
- Gingivitis – inflammation of the gums.<sup>2</sup>
- Periodontitis – oral disease that affects the gum, bone, and tissues around the teeth.<sup>2</sup>

**References:**

1. <http://www.petdental.com>
2. <http://www.entirelypets.com/petdentalcare.html>
3. Nash, H. "Brushing Teeth & Home Dental Care" at <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?cls=1&cat=1390&articleid=383>