

Critter Chatter-Periodontal Disease

One of the most common diseases affecting our four-legged friends is that of periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is the inflammation and infection of the gum tissue and supporting dental tissues (ligaments, bone) of the mouth caused by dental plaque buildup. All dogs and cats can be affected, but this problem is much more common in small and toy breeds such as Yorkies, Chihuahuas, Poodles, Pomeranians, etc. Periodontal disease is more common as a pet ages, and is prevalent in our senior and geriatric pets.

The cause of periodontal disease lies in the bacteria that reside in the dental plaque that accumulates at the margin of the gum line (or gingiva). This causes inflammation of the gingiva, leading to destruction of the supporting dental tissues that attach the tooth to surrounding bone. If left untreated, periodontal disease causes oral pain and tooth loss, and is associated with inflammation and disease in other parts of the body such as heart valves, kidneys, and liver.

Common symptoms of dental disease are bad breath, missing or loose teeth, swollen or bleeding gums, ulcerations of the gums, and oral pain. Pets with oral pain often drop their food, are reluctant to eat or have decreased appetite, have drooling or may develop other abnormal eating behaviors.

Regular oral examinations by your veterinarian are necessary to help determine the extent of dental disease. Most pets will allow for an oral examination while awake, although general anesthesia is required for a thorough dental examination, scaling and polishing of teeth, dental x-rays, and any extractions or other dental surgical procedures. Recommendations for a dental procedure should be taken seriously, as dental disease can greatly impact the health and quality of life of your pet.

Since many pets with periodontal disease are older, it is always recommended to perform a general examination and routine blood and/or urine testing. This allows the veterinarian to determine if your pet is healthy enough for general anesthesia, or if there is any underlying disease that needs treated prior to anesthesia. A different anesthesia protocol may also be used, depending on each individual pet.

Periodontal disease can be prevented by developing an oral hygiene program for your pet. The permanent teeth are typically in place around six months of age, and a home dental program is paramount to help prevent dental disease. Daily tooth brushing with pet toothpaste, will greatly help to diminish plaque buildup around teeth and help to keep your pet's teeth healthy. Rubbing tooth surfaces, and utilizing oral health care products such as rawhides, prescription dental diets, Greenies, dental chews and treats, dental toys, and dental rinses can also help to reduce buildup of dental plaque. Your veterinarian can partner with you to determine which dental products and dental care are necessary to help keep your pet healthy and smiling.