

# Pawsitive Press

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## Dental Care

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### **“If I smile pretty, can I lick your face?”**

Dental care in your pets will ensure a longer, healthier life. Teeth are in direct communication with the environment, internal bone structure and blood supply of your pet. Early gingivitis, plaque and tartar build up, or even odor may be some of the reasons your veterinarian will suggest a full and comprehensive dental cleaning for your pet.

**Question: I have a puppy; surely they don't need to have “dental exams” at their age, do they?**

Yes, even puppies require frequent exams while their permanent teeth are erupting to ensure proper expulsion of deciduous, or baby, teeth. Many small breeds, such as, but not limited to, Yorkies, Chihuahuas, Maltese, and Dachshund puppies may retain their canine

teeth or incisors. These are the large fang-like and front row teeth. When a puppy has retained teeth, they can harbor more plaque, bacteria, hair and ultimately calculus causing severe periodontal disease. It is recommended that your puppy have his/her teeth checked again between and 8-10 months old to make sure all teeth have erupted normally.

**Question: My veterinarian has recommended dental cleanings for my pet. Why is general anesthesia necessary?**

General anesthesia is necessary for proper examination and cleaning of the teeth for both dogs and cats. General anesthesia is utilized to provide a safe environment for your pet to receive an efficient scaling and polishing.

When a dog or cat receives a dental cleaning they are intubated to ensure proper care of their airway. Airway protection is very important as pets do not spit. Gravitational drainage, pharyngeal sponges and suction is usually used to remove the excess water and debris. Radiology is used, just as in people, to evaluate the alveolar bone (the bone that the tooth root is attached to in the jaw) and the root's integrity. The x-rays are best taken under general anesthesia for correct positioning and reduction of procedure time. Many pets may require dental cleaning periodically throughout their life. This will depend entirely on your individual pet's microflora and/or his gingival response to the flora.



**Dental Care Continued**

**Question: My cat has eaten hard crunchies all his life. I was told that this would prevent dental disease in my cat. Is this true? Can my cat still get dental disease?**

Yes, hard food and dental treats can help decrease the rate at which dental disease progresses, but it rarely is completely preventative. Cats may be more difficult for owners to appreciate dental disease without a veterinarian displaying the changes in the teeth during an exam. Dental disease in cats can advance very quickly and cause the gums and surrounding tissues to become so inflamed that the immune system reacts to the tooth as a foreign body. This process of resorbing and walling off the infected tooth can cause pain to the cat. These teeth must be dealt with in a timely manner to reduce the discomfort and the chance that they may fracture. Some kitties may even have a syndrome called Stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth) that is depicted by the gums and the lips being very red and irritated. Many of these kitties have to have all the teeth removed as they have a hypersensitivity to the microscopic bacteria on the tooth's surface.



**Question: How often should I have my pet's teeth examined? Are there health risks to dental disease?**

Annual health exams of your dog and cat are recommended to evaluate your pets' mouth and overall health. Not only are the teeth extremely important, but the other soft tissues of the mouth can become a health concern. Oral cancers of the mouth can be detected early in their disease process during a dental cleaning and exam. Also, dental disease can precipitate infection of other organs and systems, such as the heart, nasal passages and kidneys. Having annual blood work to evaluate the health of these systems can help provide us, and you, with the best information to ensure your pet a long and healthy life.

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