**PET DENTAL MONTH AUGUST 2024**

**So, your pet has been diagnosed with Dental Disease – what does this mean?**

Dental disease refers to changes within the mouth that can lead to negative outcomes in terms of tooth health. The most common form of dental disease is periodontal disease. Dogs and cats have a band of tissue around each tooth that holds the tooth in the socket and protects the lower part of the tooth from damage from the normal bacteria and wear and tear in the mouth. This is called the periodontal ligament. When our pets eat food there is always food debris left in the mouth, and it can sit stuck to the teeth in such small volumes we cannot see it. This then gives the bacteria in the mouth a place to hide and start “breeding”. At this stage, your pet has “plaque” on its teeth.

Plaque sitting along the gum line will cause the gums to become inflamed (red and swollen and susceptible to bleeding), this leads to poorer contact between the gum and the tooth and so exposes the periodontal ligament to this soup of bacteria. Over time the periodontal ligament will weaken due to the effects of this bacteria and so lead to deeper pockets surrounding the tooth and infection between the tooth and the socket. At this stage several things can happen.

The tooth can loosen and fall out as the periodontal ligament ceases to exist, the infection can invade the surrounding bone, and/or the infection can cross into the blood stream via the tiny inflamed blood vessels in the gums and lead to a condition called bacteraemia whereby bacteria can float happily in our blood stream until they find a place to land. Most commonly this landing site is the valves of the heart. Bacterial infection on the valves of the heart changes their shape and function from sleek perfectly designed flaps that form a magnificent seal preventing the backflow of blood within the heart, into stumpy, cauliflower-like flaps that are no longer capable of sealing thereby leading to a heart murmur and blood will flow backwards as well as forwards each time the heart contracts. And then, BAM, that simple little bit of neglected food debris on your dogs’ teeth can lead to a serious heart condition that can precipitate early death and often require years of medicating to manage and maintain a good quality of life.

**What can we do about dental disease?**

If started early, preventative action can reduce oral plaque and halt this process before it starts.

Preventative measures include:

1. Brushing your pets’ teeth with a tooth brush.

Veterinary Dental specialists advise this is the most effective method of slowing the laying down of plaque and tartar. It is the gold standard and if started early in your dog’s life and performed daily can mean your pet may never require further intervention. Do NOT use human tooth paste as it can contain agents that are toxic to our pets. There are many pet toothpastes and gels available that stick to the teeth after brushing and continue to provide action against bacteria in between brushing.

1. Feeding a “dental diet”

Dental diet biscuits are specifically designed to maintain their shape as your pet bites into them thereby rubbing the side of the tooth and cleaning it as they eat. In addition to this, many dental diets have additives that will alter the bacteria present in the mouth and slow the formation of plaque.

1. Water or food additives can reduce the oral plaque load

These are products that can be easily added to water or food that work against the harmful bacteria in the mouth or help the food debris not to stick to the teeth thereby reducing the laying down of plaque. Some products also attack tartar (the hard calcified plaque) and mean that it will breakdown and disappear leaving the mouth in a much healthier state

1. Regular high quality dental teats

Dental treats work in a similar fashion to dental diets. Many treats have a high sugar content which is not ideal so chose carefully. Dental treats must also spend a certain amount of time being “chewed” to provide their cleaning assistance. If dogs choose to swallow them whole or in 2 bites then they are unlikely to be of much assistance!

1. Regular professional dental cleaning

In some animals, despite best efforts, plaque and tartar continue to build. Vets will then recommend a dental prophy be performed to have the teeth assessed, check attachment of the periodontal ligament, and clean and polish the teeth, under general anaesthetic. Some animals will require this to be done every 12 months, others may only need 1 or 2 “dentals” in a lifetime as their natural propensity to lay down plaque and tart is lower than their counterparts.

**My vet has recommended a dental – what is involved?**

The periodontal ligament and your pet’s entire mouth of teeth are best assess under general anaesthetic. This allows your vet to probes the pocket surrounding each tooth checking for breaks in the periodontal ligament, assess the inside of each tooth (closest to the tongue) and get a good overall assessment of your dog and cat’s dental health.

Cats develop a type of change in response to plaque called faucitis. The causes erosion of the protective enamel of the tooth at and just below the gum line. This condition is extremely painful and will stop cats from eating. Once faucitis has developed the tooth needs to be removed.

Dental extractions should only be performed by veterinarians under general anaesthetic.

Some pets will require numerous teeth to be removed. If teeth are required to be removed then local anaesthetic is used so once animal recover from their general anaesthetic, pain is still controlled. Pet will also be given additional pain relief and antibiotics plus ongoing medications to aid in their recovery. Often even animals that have numerous teeth removed will recover uneventfully and most of these patients are keen to get back into their tucker the next day!

Many of the patients we are performing these procedures on are older animals. For these we recommend running full blood tests (which can be done in house the morning of the procedure) to check for any underlying issues that may alter how their anaesthetic is managed or things that may require additional treatment.

In Summary the process for the day of your pet’s dental procedure would run like this:

* Withhold food the night before your pets dental procedure
* Bring your pet to the veterinary clinic between 8.30 and 9am for admission
* Your pet will undergo a physical exam and blood testing to ensure there are healthy enough to undergo an anaesthetic
* Whilst at the clinic your pet will be anaesthetised by your veterinarian and trained nurses.
* The teeth will be checked, and teeth that are identified as diseased and requiring removal will be noted
* Local anaesthetic will be administered and diseased teeth removed.
* The remaining teeth will be scaled with an ultrasonic scalar, then polished with a dental polisher.
* Stain may be applied to detect and lurking plaque
* A full mouth rise will be performed.
* Pain relief and antibiotics will be administered as required.
* Your pet will be recovered from anaesthetic
* During the procedure animals will be administered intravenous fluids to help maintain blood pressure and contribute to the safety of the procedure.
* In recovery your pet will be kept warm and calm and be closely monitored until their final checks before they are sent home.
* Some animals will require ongoing pain relief and antibiotics which will be discussed on discharge.

Given that we are often not aware of the entirely of what will be done during your pet’s dental procedure, quoting can be difficult. We are able to give costings for a basic dental scale and polish with a guide for any extractions and medications that may be required if diseased teeth are found.