

Park Plaza Animal Hospital

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Oral Health For Your Pet

One of the most important things you can do for your animals health as they age is to take care of their oral health. Imagine, if you can, going through life NEVER brushing your teeth or going to the dentist. Dogs and cats are prone to many of the same oral conditions that people are, and contrary to popular belief they do not have “cleaner” mouths than human beings. We now know many of diseases of old age (kidney, heart, liver) in both people and animals can ultimately be traced back to poor oral health.

Why do animals need oral health care?

As dogs and cats eat, food debris accumulates and bacteria multiply exponentially in response to having an abundant food source. This debris in the animals' mouth will form a sticky substance we call plaque. The accumulation of plaque over time will calcify into a rock hard substance called tartar. This is no different than the tartar that accumulates on our teeth, but since animals don't brush their teeth it can accumulate very rapidly by comparison. Bacteria now will live not only on the surface of the plaque but also underneath it, on the surface of the tooth, and now these microorganisms have a nice roof over their heads. It's these bacteria that come into contact with the gingiva, and that contact begins a process that ultimately can lead to periodontal (the area under the gums) disease, abscessation and then to serious oral pain and tooth loss.

In addition to periodontal disease, there are other oral diseases that can cause animals serious problems. One found somewhat commonly in cats is called stomatitis, and it is basically a severe out of control inflammation of the tissues in the mouth. Many times we have no choice but to remove most or all of the teeth to alleviate the considerable pain the animal is in. Additionally, animals' teeth can have a condition called “resorptive lesions” (also commonly called “neck lesions”), which are sort of like cavities in humans, but with an unknown cause. Usually there is no treatment option for a neck lesion other than to remove the entire tooth. Teeth can also fracture from trauma, or because the enamel is weak. Usually the only course of action with a fractured tooth is also extraction.

What will we do at Park Plaza to help your animal's oral health?

Unlike people who will sit still to have their teeth cleaned by a dental hygienist, animals will require general anesthesia to have routine cleaning performed. If an animal is over five years old we will usually require a pre operative blood work panel to ensure that the animal can safely undergo anesthesia. While under anesthesia a breathing tube will be placed to ensure an open airway, and to deliver gas to keep the patient anesthetized. A thorough examination of all teeth both above and below the gum line will be performed, and if needed we can also take dental x-rays. These can be invaluable when we suspect

an abscessed or broken tooth. The teeth are cleaned with an ultrasonic scaler, similar to what a human dentist would use, and the teeth are polished afterwards. We will often do a fluoride treatment as well, which helps to strengthen the enamel of the tooth. At Park Plaza Animal Hospital teeth are typically cleaned and polished by a certified veterinary technician.

If your animal needs any teeth extracted, we refer to this as oral surgery. Sometimes teeth will come out easily, other times it will require extensive surgery and significant time to safely remove the tooth. Extractions at Park Plaza are performed, exclusively by the veterinarian on duty. If oral surgery is performed, there will often be dissolvable sutures placed to close the extraction sites. Your pet will often be prescribed pain medications and antibiotics if we have performed oral surgery.

What can you do to help take care of your oral health?

If you notice a bad odor coming from your pet's mouth, or they seem slower to eat their food, call us. These could be signs of oral health problems. If your pet's teeth are no longer pearly white, but tan to brown colored, this is usually due to tartar accumulation. Your pet's regular annual checkups are critical, where we will look at the teeth, and tell you if we see any problems. Preventing oral disease in your pet is far better and ultimately much less expensive than waiting until their teeth need extraction. After your pet has had their teeth cleaned, brushing them on a regular basis can greatly improve their oral health. Brushing your pet's teeth may seem like a strange concept, but if you think about it, why wouldn't they benefit the same way we do from good oral home care?

Schedule an appointment with us at Park Plaza Animal Hospital as soon as possible if you suspect your pet may need oral health care. Thank you for choosing us to provide the best medical care possible for your pet.