

Ask the Vet



Douglas R. Nabel, DVM

"A native of Connecticut, I've wanted to be a veterinarian since I was a child. I graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University with a BA and received my Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from The Ohio State University in 1991. Wanting to escape the snow and cold winters sparked the move to North Carolina 20 years ago. I started working at Thomasville Veterinary Hospital then became co-owner of James Landing Veterinary Hospital in 1998."

Are dental problems the same in pets and people?

No. The most common problem in people is tooth decay which is, due to the loss of calcium from the enamel. In dogs and cats decay or cavities represent less than 10% of dental problems, the majority of which are caused by periodontal disease.

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is inflammation (gingivitis) or infection of the tissues surrounding the tooth. Accumulation of tartar (calculus) on the tooth contributes to gum recession around the base of the tooth. Infection soon follows causing further recession. Infection around the tooth socket causes a foul odor and may spread deeper in the socket creating an abscess or more severe problems. Many times pets start experiencing pain. Ultimately the tooth loosens and falls out or needs to be removed.

What signs am I likely to see?

Dogs and cats may show a decreased interest in food, or approach the food bowl but show a reluctance to eat. They may chew with caution or discomfort, drop food from their mouth or may swallow with difficulty. Excessive drooling may be seen and there may be an unpleasant odor to the breath. In some cases dogs and cats may paw at their mouths or have swollen areas present on their face. A reluctance to eat may lead to weight loss, which over time can be extensive. Many pets refuse dry food and prefer moist or canned foods. Dental disease and oral pain may account for "picky appetites" that develop.

What is tartar?

The mouth of mammals contain thousands of bacteria. These bacteria multiply on the surfaces of teeth to form an invisible layer called plaque, which thickens and becomes mineralized forming visible tartar. Tartar is identified by its tan or brown color- it normally starts at the gum edge, especially on the back teeth. In severe cases it may cover the entire tooth. In addition, the bacteria are absorbed into the bloodstream and carried to other organs. Heart valve infections (endocarditis), kidney and liver problems are frequently due to bad teeth.

Can tartar be prevented?

Plaque is mineralized quicker in some dogs and cats than others. The primary goal is to keep the mouth as hygienic as possible and reduce the rate of tartar build up. Recent advances in nutrition have resulted in diets that reduce tartar accumulation. Your veterinarian can give specific dietary recommendations that will benefit your pet's dental health. Special dog toys and chews as well as dog and cat treats help reduce tartar.

The most effective way of reducing plaque and tartar is brushing daily or at a minimum every other day. The key is to acclimate your pet early to brushing. Several toothpastes and brushes are available from your veterinarian designed for dogs and cats. DO NOT USE HUMAN TOOTHPASTE on your pet, many contain sodium which may harm your pet. They foam and are not meant to be swallowed. Alternates to brushing are antibacterial mouthwashes, sprays and gels to reduce the number of bacteria present.

What should I do if my pet has signs of dental problems?

If your pet has tartar accumulation, gingivitis, exhibiting signs of mouth pain or discomfort, your veterinarian should examine them as soon as possible to discuss the most appropriate course of treatment. A dental cleaning will be scheduled. Prior to a dental cleaning, pre-anesthesia blood tests are performed to ensure that liver and kidney functions are satisfactory. Sometimes antibiotic treatment is instituted before the full dental prophylaxis is carried out. Tartar is removed through scaling by hand and using ultrasonic cleaning equipment to remove tartar above and below the gum line. The teeth are polished to help prevent subsequent plaque build up.

Your veterinarian will help you keep your pet's mouth and smile healthy.

February is National Pet Dental Month. Dental disease is the most common disease in dogs and cats but often times the *most* overlooked by pet owners. Approximately two-thirds (68%) of all pets over the age of three have some form of periodontal or dental disease.

James Landing Veterinary Hospital, P.A.



February is National Pet Dental Month

- Full-service veterinary medical facility
- Promoting responsible pet ownership, preventative health care & health-related educational opportunities
- Provides the best possible medical, surgical & dental care
- Geriatrics, Exotics
- Boarding & grooming

—Ask about our Pet Portals—

Hours of Operation

Monday—Friday . . . 7:00am - 5:30pm
Saturday 8:00am - 12:30pm

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