

# Ask the Vet



**Tim Banker DVM, FAVD**, has been in general practice for 38 years and has always seen the need for proper dental care for his patients. In fact, in the 1970's many people laughed at his dedication to his patients' dental health. Today he is considered a pioneer in the field of Veterinary Dentistry. Dr. Banker lives in Greensboro and is the owner of **Sedgefield Animal Hospital & Dental Center**. For the past 30 years he has been a referral dentist and has seen patients from all over the Southeastern United States and Canada.



Heavy dental calculus with severe infection



## How Important is Good Dental Health?

When performing a Comprehensive Oral Health Assessment the two most common conditions we find in dogs and cats are Periodontal Disease and Broken Teeth! Here are some of the most frequently asked questions.

### Q What is Periodontal Disease, how does it occur?

A Periodontal Disease is considered the most common infection in both man and animals.

Periodontal Disease is a combination of infection and inflammation of the tissues that surround the tooth (the Periodontium). After eating, a thin film quickly collects on the teeth; the film is invaded by bacteria within 12 hours (Plaque). If this plaque is not brushed off completely within 3 days it will mineralize into Calculus (Tartar).

### Q Can Calculus be removed by regular brushing?

A Calculus has to be professionally removed by scaling the teeth, brushing will not remove it.

### Q What causes the inflammation in my pet's mouth to occur?

A The pet's immune system reacts to the bacteria, causing inflammation. In addition, some of the bacteria release toxins that create additional inflammation. Tissues surrounding the teeth get caught in a 'war zone'. The result is destruction of these tissues (bone, gum tissue and periodontal ligament). The only way to stop the destructive process is to professionally clean the area (scaling, polishing, root planning & subgingival curettage).

### Q How can I tell if my pet has Periodontal Disease?

A Sometimes you can find signs, sometimes you can't – Periodontal Disease can be silent and go undetected (without a Periodontal Examination). Common Indications of Periodontal Disease can include: bad breath (halitosis), accumulations of plaque and calculus on teeth, Inflamed, red or bleeding gums. Yet, sometimes we have found

patients that have significant destruction of tissue under the gum line with no visible sign of problems above the gum line. This can only be detected with a thorough evaluation under anesthesia.

### Q What can happen if this is left untreated?

A Tissue and bone destruction can lead to pain, discomfort and tooth loss. The infection and inflammation is believed to affect the kidneys, liver, heart and lungs. Chronic infection stresses the immune system. Bad breath can be offensive and unhealthy. Infections and abscesses can occur in the nasal and sinus passages. In extreme cases the jawbone can become chronically infected and jaw fractures can occur.

### Q What can I do?

A The first step is to do a complete Periodontal Examination including Dental Radiographs. Based on the findings we can then prescribe the proper treatment which could include scaling, polishing, root planing, GTR (Guided Tissue Regeneration), Periodontal Surgery or Extractions. Once the infection and inflammation is under control your pet will look and feel much better. Once the mouth is clean again we can determine a custom home care and a follow-up program.

### Q What about a broken tooth?

A The facts are broken teeth are just as painful for our pets as they are for us. Broken teeth can lead to internal infection, abscesses, bone and sinus infections. A broken tooth needs to be treated not ignored! Pet will hide and mask the pain it experiences from having broken teeth.

### Q What are the options for broken teeth?

A Root canal therapy is often recommended for the canine and chewing (carnassial) teeth. Sometimes vital pulp therapy can be performed in young pets. If the fracture is mild sometimes restorative therapy (fillings) & resin sealants are possible treatment options. Unfortunately, extractions may be the only treatment possible in some teeth. This is always a valid option to eliminate pain and infection.

### Q Why do you need to take dental x-rays?

A They are necessary to properly evaluate and monitor broken teeth. It is impossible to properly evaluate an affected tooth without them.

### Q What can I do to avoid broken teeth in my pet?

A It is important not to give your pet hard objects to chew on (bones, cow hooves, Nylabones®, hard compressed raw hide, ice, etc.). It is a myth that they need them to 'keep their teeth clean.' Brushing is the best way to reduce plaque and calculus accumulation to avoid Periodontal Disease. Most people don't know tennis balls are also bad for your pet's teeth. The texture of the ball can actually wear down the enamel of the teeth! Soft & flexible rubber toys & balls are much safer.

**Sedgefield Animal Hospital & Dental Center**, located at 4740 High Point Rd. in Greensboro, has been serving the Triad for over 30 years.

We will happily assist you with any of your pet's needs, our motto is **"Where Quality and Caring are more than just words."** Give us a call at **336.294.1944**, "Like" us on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/SedgefieldVet](http://www.facebook.com/SedgefieldVet).

