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Dr. Curran, her two sons and daughter like to spend time at the beach. They have one adopted dog named Georgia.

Dr. Curran grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. She completed her undergraduate and veterinary medical degrees at the University of Georgia. She is a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Animal Hospital Association and the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association. She has special interests in internal medicine and ultrasonography.

DENTAL DISEASE

The good, the bad and the preventable...

We have heard from a very young age to brush our teeth. People spend much time and incur considerable expense at the dentist. The recommendation is that people go to the dentist and have a full dental examination and teeth cleaning twice yearly. If you have ever had any dental problems, you know that mouth pain is horrible, to say the least. We have been educated that dental health is directly related to our overall health. So it shouldn't be surprising that dental health care is important to our pets!

Dental disease is a very commonly diagnosed problem in small animal veterinary medicine. Gum disease is an infection resulting from buildup of plaque on the surface of the teeth and around gums. Bacteria builds up in the plaque and causes infection in the bone holding the teeth. The infection causes deterioration of the bone which is called periodontal disease. The signs of dental disease are bad breath,

bleeding, pain and loss of teeth. The bacteria in the mouth can enter the blood stream and cause damage to organs such as the kidneys, liver and heart.

Dental care is best started early in puppies and kittens. A dental routine that begins when pets are young can help prevent plaque buildup and also allow pets to be trained. Preventive care is much less costly in the



Before (top photo) and After (bottom photo) Dental Cleaning

long term and is much better for the health of your pet. Many times older patients present at examination with horrible dental disease at an old age and the damage is overwhelming. Patients with advanced periodontal disease will often need surgery to remove abscessed teeth. There can be an increased health risk due to age and severe infection of the mouth.

Prevention is a very important part of dental health care. Tooth brushing is the gold standard for prevention of plaque and tartar buildup. The tooth brush will manually remove plaque along the gum line. Never use human toothpaste as it is not meant to be swallowed. Animal toothpaste comes in flavors such as chicken and vanilla and contains an enzyme to break down the plaque. Only the outside surface of teeth need to be brushed because the insides are kept cleaner due to saliva and the tongue. The more often the teeth are brushed, the better the results. Even brushing two to three times weekly will help prevent tartar, however, daily is better. Talk with your veterinarian about techniques to help with teeth brushing. Topical antiseptics such as rinses and wipes help decrease bacteria and help prevent gum disease. These products can be helpful, especially if used daily. Dental chews, treats and diets help reduce plaque by manual removal with chewing, and there are many products for both dogs and cats. A list of approved diets and treats is available by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (vohc.org), a group which gives a seal of approval based on scientific studies. Chew toys can also manually remove tartar with abrasion. However, be very careful with toys which can be chewed into chunks that can be a swallowing or choking hazard. Hard toys such as cow hooves, antlers and bones can break teeth which may expose roots and can lead to tooth abscesses.

Your veterinarian will examine your pet's teeth during yearly examinations and may recommend a routine teeth cleaning when needed. Teeth cleaning is done with general anesthesia to allow for proper cleaning and examination. Proper evaluation of the mouth is difficult without anesthesia. A dental scaler is used to remove tartar from the surface of teeth and below the gum line. The gingival pockets are probed and measured, and dental x-rays may be taken to evaluate tooth roots for disease. The enamel is polished to smooth the tooth surface and teeth are treated with fluoride sealer. Dental charting and notes are made of any abnormalities. Recommendations for further dental procedures such as extraction of diseased teeth and root canals will be discussed.

Dental care is extremely important for our pets. Home care will help prevent problems in the future and give greater quality of life to older pets. Teeth brushing is the best way to remove plaque from the teeth and promote a healthier mouth and fresh breath!



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