

ROUTINE DENTISTRY

Why do cats and dogs need dental cleanings?

Cats and dogs accumulate tartar on their teeth, just like we do. As the tartar builds up, it forms plaque and a hard mineralized substance called calculus. If tartar and plaque are allowed to persist, the pet will develop periodontal disease. More information about periodontal disease is provided on the reverse side.

What can I do to prevent dental disease?

There are several ways to prevent dental disease, and often these can eliminate or reduce the need for anesthetic dental cleanings. The gold standard is to brush your pet's teeth once daily with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste formulated for use in pets. Human toothpaste is not safe, as it contains fluoride, which is toxic if ingested. Other preventative methods include chewing on safe rawhides (usually the compressed form) or CET chews, and feeding a diet that is designed to promote healthy teeth and gums (Hill's t/D and Purina DH work well.)

What is included in a dental cleaning?

Cats and dogs need to be under general anesthesia for dental cleanings. Once they are asleep and stable, we clean all tooth surfaces with a high frequency ultrasonic scaler. In addition we clean out the normal pockets under the gumline. We then probe the perimeter of each tooth, checking for deep pockets, and record pocket depth – the same procedure that is followed when we see our own dentists. We then polish the teeth with a motorized polisher and apply a fluoride treatment.

How often does my pet need to have a dental cleaning?

On average, cats and dogs will need to have their teeth cleaned once yearly. However, some pets with severe disease may need to have dental work every six months, while some can maintain healthy teeth for several years in between cleanings.

What can I expect on the day of dentistry?

You will drop your pet off at the clinic between 7:10am and 7:30am. We will perform a routine blood panel to determine that your pet does not have any health problems that would contraindicate anesthesia, and then administer a light sedative. Your pet will receive intravenous fluids throughout the procedure and for several hours after he/she recovers from anesthesia. A routine dental cleaning takes approximately 20-30 minutes for cats, and 30-45 minutes for dogs. If dental X-rays or extractions are indicated, the length of time can vary widely.

Approximate cost: \$320-\$400

The cost of a routine dentistry will vary based on the size and age of the pet. The above estimate is for routine dentistry only, and does not include any dental X-rays or extractions.

PERIODONTAL DISEASE

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease refers to the tissues surrounding the tooth itself, such as gum tissue (gingiva) and the bone that surrounds the tooth roots. As plaque and tartar build up on the tooth surface, bacteria from the mouth live within that debris. It infiltrates the normal pocket up under the gum line, causing inflammation and irritation of the gum tissue – otherwise known as gingivitis. Gingivitis is reversible by removing the build up from the teeth and gingival pockets. If gingivitis is allowed to persist, the gum tissue begins to recede, exposing the tooth roots. Eventually the bacteria infect the bone that surrounds the tooth roots, causing bone infection, loss of bone support and loose teeth. Gum recession and bone infections are painful processes, and result in the loss of teeth.

Why can my pet still eat if he/she is painful?

Dogs and cats will persist in eating even in the face of severe oral pain, so that is not an accurate determination of the degree of dental disease. They will not allow themselves to starve, but they are experiencing chronic pain from root exposure or bone infections. Many pets that receive appropriate care for severe dental disease will display an increased activity level and more playful personality once the problems in their mouths are resolved.

How do you treat periodontal disease?

The first step is to schedule a dental cleaning under general anesthesia. After the teeth are clean and able to be evaluated, we will probe the perimeter of each tooth and record the depth of the pockets – just like when we go to the human dentist. Deep pockets (more than 2-3mm) indicate loss of gingival attachment and possible loss of bone density. The next step is to take dental X-rays of any broken teeth or teeth with abnormal pockets. This allows us to visualize the tooth roots and surrounding bone to evaluate for abscesses around the root tip, loss of bone, or broken roots. The veterinarian will then be able to accurately assess if a tooth needs to be extracted, or if it can be salvaged.

Will my pet still be able to eat if teeth need to be extracted?

Yes. Many pets continue to eat dry food if only a few teeth are missing. If many or most of the teeth are missing or extracted, some pets will need to be fed a canned or soft diet. Remember that even with some missing teeth, the resolution of periodontal disease and relief from associated pain will make them much more comfortable and happy.

Approximate cost: Starting at \$350

It is difficult to estimate for severe dental disease, as the cost can vary WIDELY depending on the extent of disease and the amount of work that needs to be done. We can provide you with a personalized estimate for your pet once we have performed a physical and oral exam.