

## PREVENTATIVE DENTAL CARE

Many people do not realize that pets need to have routine care done for their teeth, just like people. Imagine if you were to go for a whole year without brushing your teeth – yuck! So it is no wonder that our pets are subject to heavy tartar accumulations, gingivitis, bad breath, and potentially loose teeth and severe jawbone infections.

The best time to start doing daily dental care is when your pet is a puppy or kitten. That way they get used to having their mouths handled at a young age, and do not get alarmed when you try to look in the mouth or brush their teeth. There are several ways to provide daily dental care for your cat or dog.

- **Toothbrushing:** This is the gold standard for pet dental care. Pets should have their teeth brushed once daily with a soft bristle toothbrush and toothpaste that is made for pets. Human toothpaste is not acceptable, as it contains fluoride – during brushing, your pet will inevitably swallow some toothpaste, and fluoride is toxic if ingested. You will only be able to brush the outside surface of the teeth. Start with the front incisors and canines, and then once your pet is used to the idea, you should work backwards, slipping under the cheeks, to get the premolars and molars.
- **Safe Chewing:** Daily chewing on a safe rawhide or dental chew can greatly reduce plaque/tartar accumulation and gingivitis. Only allow your pet to have access to the chew for 20 minutes – this increases interest by decreasing availability. We stock a variety of both rawhide and vegetable based chews dental chews by CET. They are safe, palatable, and very effective. We also recommend compressed rawhides that you can get at local pet stores. These rawhides are compressed sheets, rather than the type with knots in the ends. We have examples in the clinic if you are not sure which type to get.
- **Dental Diets:** There are several commercial diets that help to maintain healthy teeth and gums. We carry Hill's T/D and Purina DH. Both of these diets are designed to have large kibbles to encourage chewing, and are formulated so that they scrape the sides of the teeth rather than exploding away from the tooth.
- **Routine Dental Cleanings:** Sometimes pets will have persistent plaque, tartar, and gingivitis despite adequate home care. Often this is related to their genetics and overall immune system. In these circumstances, your pet may need to have a dental cleaning under anesthesia. This is a routine procedure that is quite safe with the appropriate safeguards. Once the teeth are clean, then continued home care is helpful to prevent the recurrence of dental disease. Some pets will not allow their owners to perform home dental care, and do not like to chew on anything. Often these pets will need regular dental cleanings under anesthesia. Please refer to our dentistry handout for more information on anesthetic dental cleanings and periodontal disease.