

Dental disease in pets

Have you ever wondered why it was that dogs and cats always have bad breath? That adorable little ball of fur that you love so much may have a hidden disease that you didn't know about. That disease is periodontal disease (PD) or "tooth decay". Did you know that 85% of dogs over 4 years of age already have signs of periodontal disease (PD)? Toy breed dogs are very prone to PD but all dogs suffer eventually from this disease. Periodontal disease (PD) is inflammation around the structures that hold the tooth in place. This causes the teeth to get progressively looser until they eventually fall out. Through proper education about what to look for and through preventative maintenance, we can slow the progression of this awful problem.

PD begins when the normal bacteria of the mouth begin to clump together and form plaque. This plaque combined with the saliva of the mouth bond almost like concrete to form dental tartar, the nasty hard brown shell found on many dogs and cats teeth. As this tartar stays stuck to the tooth, beneath the tartar, the bacteria begin to eat away at the gums. This slow erosion is the beginning of gingivitis which will eventually progress to PD. PD has been shown to cause many other diseases other than just mouth disease. Heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease and abscesses have all been attributed to PD. Stopping PD from ever starting is paramount to control of the disease.

The old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is definitely true regarding dental disease as well. Prevention should be aimed at reducing the number of plaque causing bacteria and removal of any tartar that builds up. I consider good dental hygiene to involve 4 steps. Step 1 starts with feeding. Dry food is better for dental health than wet food. Also, dental treats help to remove some of the tartar. Step 2 involves eliminating the plaque causing bacteria. This can be done with several veterinary dental water additives that act like mouthwash but are safe for the pet to consume. Step 3 is the most effective at home treatment and that is brushing your pets' teeth with a toothbrush and toothpaste. There are a variety of chicken, beef, liver, mint flavored toothpastes to try to entice your pet into liking the brushing. This step is also the most difficult. Many pets just won't allow you to brush their teeth and if that's the case, you will have to try the other steps. Step 4 is the last step in prevention of PD and its regular veterinary examination and descaling/cleaning of the teeth. This step can only be done by your veterinarian but is crucial to ensuring your pet's health. This step causes a lot of anxiety on the owners' part because it involves anesthesia to keep your pet asleep while the procedure is performed. With the many advances in veterinary anesthesia, there are much safer methods to use than in years past. Inhalant (Gas) anesthesia is a must for the safety of your pet. Ensure that your veterinarian will use gas anesthesia for your pets dental cleaning. Use as many of these 4 steps for prevention of PD as possible to keep your pet healthy and the breath on the fresh side!