

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February is National Pet Dental Health Month

Vermont Veterinarians say Pets, Like Humans, Need Regular Checkups

by M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM

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If you ever wonder what your teeth would look like if you never brushed or flossed, take a look at your dog or cat's teeth! 85% of dogs and cats have dental disease by age three years!! Dental tartar is not just cosmetic. In our pets, as in humans, it can lead to serious health consequences. Because pets don't brush away plaque, it mineralizes into tartar. This in turn pushes up under the gums, providing a spot for bacterial infection in the bone and gums. The infection loosens the ligament that holds the tooth and eats away at the bone around it. This is a very painful process. Eventually, the tooth falls out and, if the bone damage is severe enough, the jaw can break. The bacteria from the mouth can also seed other areas of the body, leading to infection in organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys.

The only way to resolve dental disease is to have a professional cleaning at your veterinarian's. A thorough dental cleaning cannot be performed without general anesthesia at a veterinary clinic. It is similar to what a person receives at their dentist's office: visible tartar is removed with instruments, tartar at the gum line is removed with more delicate instruments, tartar under the gum line is scraped and removed, and the tooth is polished to smooth any unevenness left by the tartar. (This is important because unpolished teeth collect plaque and tartar much quicker than normal.) After the dental cleaning, the pet's mouth is thoroughly examined by a veterinarian to look for/and remove any loose/broken or diseased teeth, as well as checking the inner lips, tongue, and gums for any abnormalities.

Unfortunately, some pet owners try to overlook their pet's dental problems or in some cases are reluctant to pursue dental treatment for their pet due to its age or the fear of anesthesia. Dental care should not be avoided in older pets. On the contrary, it is even more important that it be addressed, as older pets are at higher risk for some of the consequences of untreated dental disease. This and concerns about anesthesia should be discussed with your veterinarian who can explain the procedure and address your concerns.

Have your veterinarian perform a thorough exam of your pet and its mouth every six to twelve months. They can suggest ways to prevent dental disease, and if your pet has dental disease, they have the right equipment, training, medications and skills necessary to address it. Veterinarians have made a lifetime commitment to the health and welfare of all animals, and proper care, beginning with addressing dental disease, can help your pet can live a longer, healthier life.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of more than 330 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.