

## Dentistry for your Pet--FAQs

Your pet's veterinarian has recommended that you get your pet's teeth cleaned or that your pet needs a "Dental". What exactly do they mean and what is involved?

### 1. Why does my pet need a "dental"?

Dental disease is a very common problem in pets. Advanced disease can lead to bone loss, tooth loss, severe oral infections which can damage your pet's brain, heart and kidneys. It is best to prevent advanced disease with preventative cleanings. Indications of early dental disease can include visible tartar build-up (yellow to brown or even black build-up on the tooth crown) and bad breath.

Your veterinarian may be recommending a dental cleaning because of early disease or to manage advanced periodontal problems.

### 2. What is a "dental"?

A comprehensive dental exam and cleaning cannot be done on a non-anesthetized pet (see <http://www.avdc.org/dentalscaling.html> for more info). Therefore, a "dental" is a general anesthetic procedure. In order to make this as safe as possible:

- Your pet will be examined by one of our veterinarians before the procedure.
- Our veterinarians recommend blood work before the procedure—this will check the functioning of the kidneys and liver, check for infection, anemia, screen for certain diseases, and verify that we have an adequate blood sugar level. Depending on the age of your pet, this blood work may be required.
- A pre-anesthetic sedative will be administered—this helps relax your pet and reduces the amount anesthetic drugs we have to use.
- We place an intravenous (IV) catheter. This is done for several reasons:
  - Provides venous access for anesthetic drug administration without the drug leaking out of the vein (these drugs sting if they get out of the vein!)
  - We provide IV fluids during the procedure—gas anesthetic drops the blood pressure, so fluids are very important during any anesthetic procedure. Extended low blood pressure can damage the kidneys!
  - Immediate venous access—in the rare event that we should need to administer additional drugs.
- Your pet will have an endotracheal tube placed and then put on a gas anesthesia. The endotracheal tube allows direct administration of oxygen and anesthesia gas (isoflurane) and prevents fluid and debris from the mouth from entering the lungs.
- Our cleanings are performed by licensed technicians with comprehensive training beyond their licensing education.
- We use a sonic scaler (not a rotary bur, which can easily damage the enamel). Our dental "base" includes handpieces for polishing (VERY important step in the cleaning!), a high-speed drill for use in dental surgery, air/water/solution handpiece for checking under the gum line (the most important area to clean), irrigating problem areas, and verifying the tartar and plaques have been completely removed.
- Hand-held scalers, explorers, probes, and curettes are used to check the gingival (gum) margin and teeth and to supplement the sonic scaler, especially for work under the gum line.
- The surfaces of the teeth are polished to smooth out any imperfections caused by cleaning (just as your dentist does for your teeth). The entire mouth is examined, charted, and treated as needed, then rinsed with a mild cleaning solution. The back of the throat is checked for fluid and debris before the patient begins recovery.
- Your pet has another technician assigned to the sole responsibility of monitoring your pet under anesthesia.

- Your pet's vital signs are monitored, including blood pressure. This technician also takes charting information from the dental tech, and provides positive ventilation to ensure full lung inflation.
- We provide a safe heat source for your pet to maintain body temperature during the procedure.
- Your pet will be monitored during recovery from anesthesia, wrapped in warmed blankets, and provided with additional pain medications if needed.
- We will send home a dental chart with any problems of note for your pet's record.

### 3. When should I get my pet's teeth cleaned?

Please schedule your appointment for a dental cleaning as soon as possible when recommended—we prefer to prevent disease if we can! If there are severe problems noted by the doctor, the earlier we get to them, the earlier we can make your pet feel better. Advanced disease in the mouth can be quite painful, and oral infection can affect your pet's health and behavior.

Some dog breeds, especially small & toy breeds and sight hounds, tend to be prone to dental problems and disease. They may need professional cleanings more frequently than other breeds.

Some cats are prone to dental disease in different ways than dogs. Cats can get tartar build-up, fractures, and gingival disease like dogs, but some cats are prone to resorptive lesions or stomatitis. Stomatitis is very painful, as are lesions that have progressed to the pulp cavity. For more information either of these topics, visit <http://www.avdc.org/dentaldisease.html>.

### 4. How do you get your pet's dental done?

Schedule the appointment with our reception staff. If your pet's veterinarian recommended blood testing or to start any medications (such as antibiotics), swing by a day or two before the procedure to pick up medications and so we can collect a small blood sample. We can also collect the sample and run it the day of the dental.

We will ask that you withhold food on the day of the procedure. They will stay with us for the day, and the doctor will go over any instructions with you when your pet goes home.

### 5. Prevention

The best thing you can do for your pet's dental health is to brush their teeth! (Shocking, isn't it!) Daily brushing is the best, using a toothbrush designed for your pet (or an extra-soft child's toothbrush) and pet toothpaste.

There are several pet-friendly flavors to choose from. Do not use toothpaste made for people!

See the brushing demonstration on our website (<http://southcarevet.com/client-forms/internet-resources/>)

### 6. What to look for in veterinary dental services:

- Extensive training and education! Dentistry is not a topic covered in depth during school for either veterinarians or technicians. It is very important that both your veterinarian and dental technician have completed extensive additional training and education.
- Safe anesthetic procedures—the procedure should include the safest anesthetics, an IV catheter and fluid administration, a technician **dedicated to cardiac/anesthetic monitoring during the procedure**.
- Comprehensive cleaning—the most important area to clean is at and above (under) the gumline. Just removing the visible tartar will not help prevent or manage dental disease. Trained dentistry staff, modern equipment, supplemental sterilized hand instruments, and available dental x-ray are very important.