



Healthy Pet Tips

Help your pet stay healthy with clean teeth.

Maintaining your pet's teeth is one of the best ways you can keep him in good health and perhaps even lengthen his time with you. By brushing your pet's teeth and having them cleaned, scaled and polished annually by your veterinarian, you can reduce the risk of heart trouble and kidney failure that is sometimes caused by the bacteria linked with severe dental disease. And, your pet will have nicer breath, too!

Some pet owners mistakenly believe their pets don't need their teeth cleaned. Others assume that a dry food diet pushes tartar off teeth. The fact is, dental disease is just as common in dogs and cats as it is in people. Just as with people, tartar pushes the gum away from the roots of the teeth. When these conditions appear in both humans and their pets, the diagnoses are the same: gingivitis, tonsillitis and pharyngitis (sore throat). The results are loose teeth, which allows infections to enter and destroy the root socket. Eventually, the tooth will loosen and fall out or have to be extracted.

Canine and feline dental problems begin to appear early. The American Veterinary Dental Society (AVDS) says that by age three, 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats will show signs of gum disease. It's the small dog breeds that appear to suffer from periodontal infection more than the larger breeds since their teeth are often too big for their mouths. For cats, cervical line lesions are the most common dental disease. Interestingly, this disease was not even recognized until the mid 1970s. Today, however, nearly 30 percent of felines have at least one gum lesion.

The AVDS encourages pet owners to clean their pets' teeth at home in addition to having their veterinarian conduct regular dental cleanings. For many pet owners, an annual dental cleaning is part of their pets' regular routine care program.

The great news for your company's employees is that they can add the optional Pet Well Care Protection coverage rider to their VPI base medical plan so that a portion of the annual dental cleaning cost is covered. And, there is no deductible on routine care benefits!

By starting when a puppy or kitten is young, pet owners can train them to accept dental cleanings, both at home and at the veterinarian.

Some symptoms to be aware of and bring to your veterinarian's attention include:

- Yellow and brown build-up of tartar along the gum line
- Inflamed (red) gums
- Bad breath

Many pets enjoy the teeth brushing time with their owners and will open wide when they see the toothbrush coming their way. Be sure to always use toothpaste made especially for dogs or cats and not human toothpaste. At least once each year your pet should receive a proper teeth cleaning by a veterinarian. No matter how well you brush your pets' teeth, unless your pet is under anesthesia you can't reach those places where tartar and plaque build up.

To learn more about protecting your pets and to obtain a free quote, call or log onto

VPI Pet Insurance plans cover dogs, cats, birds and exotic pets for medical problems and conditions relating to accidents, illnesses and injuries. Optional Pet Well Care Protection coverage is also available. All applications are subject to underwriting approval. Policies are available in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Policies are underwritten by Veterinary Pet Insurance Company in California and in all other states by National Casualty Company, an A+15 rated company, in Madison, Wisconsin and a subsidiary of Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company.
©2009 Veterinary Pet Insurance Company. 08GRP191

This article may be used for duplication and reprinting.

