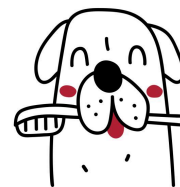




## Canine Dental Disease



Dental disease is one of the most common medical conditions affecting our canine companions. Over 80% of dogs over the age of three have active dental disease. With human dental disease, we most commonly see tooth decay and cavities. Tooth decay makes up about only 10% of canine dental disease. With canines, we see periodontal disease, which is infection/inflammation of the periodontium, or the surrounding tissues of the teeth. Four tissues comprise the periodontium: the gingiva (gums), the cementum (covering of the root surface), the periodontal ligament (attaching the tooth root to the bone), and the bone surrounding the tooth.

Signs of dental disease in dogs can be any or all of the following:

- Bad breath
- Excessive drooling, "ropey" saliva, blood in saliva
- Discolored teeth
- Chewing on one side of the mouth
- Inflamed/bleeding gums
- Blood on toys or in the water bowl
- Loose or missing teeth
- Reduced appetite

Periodontal disease begins with inflammation of the gums, or gingivitis. Signs of this can include visible redness along the gumline, and pain when eating hard food or chewing hard bones/toys. If left untreated, infection can spread deeper into the tooth socket, causing more severe disease. This infection can lead to tooth loss, abscesses, oronasal fistulas (a hole between the mouth and the nasal cavity), bone infection of the jaw, or a pathologic (disease-induced) fracture of the jaw. In cases of severe dental disease, some of the bacteria in the mouth may get into the bloodstream and cause pathological changes in major organs, such as the heart, liver, or kidneys.

But what causes this disease in dogs? The mouth is a perfect breeding ground for bacteria. Bacteria multiplies on the surface of the tooth, forming a layer of plaque. Some plaque is removed by a dog's tongue and chewing habits, but the plaque that is not removed mineralizes and solidifies into tartar. The tartar attracts more bacteria, causing more visible buildup on the teeth, and furthering the dental disease.

Periodontal disease can be reversed if caught very early. The gingivitis stage (the first stage) is the only stage that is truly reversible. Gingivitis can be treated with antibiotics and at home brushing of your dog's teeth. Once plaque and tartar have started to set in, a dog will require a dental cleaning, performed by a veterinary professional. For a dental cleaning, a dog must be put under anesthesia, and the teeth are scaled and polished - removing all tartar. At this time, any loose or broken teeth will be removed as well.

Periodontal disease is preventable with daily brushing of your dog's teeth. It is good to start when your dog is young, so that they get used to the process, and also to start early prevention of dental disease. When brushing your dog's teeth, be sure to use a canine-specific toothpaste, as our toothpastes can be toxic to dogs. There are toothbrushes that are specifically made for dogs as well; some are double sided with a small bristles on one side and larger bristles on the other side, and there are brushes that go on your finger

as well. When introducing brushing, be patient and start with short intervals. Some dogs may not allow brushing, no matter how patient you are or how tasty the toothpaste is, but there are other methods for keeping your dog's mouth clean. There are water additives that you can put in your dog's drinking water that help control the bacteria in the mouth. There are also dental chews for dogs that help break off some of the tartar if your dog is a good chewer.