



## Feline Dental Disease



Dental disease is one of the most common ailments affecting our feline friends. More than 50% of all cats have some form of dental disease, after 3 years of age.

The signs of dental disease in cats are as follows; cats may show one or multiple signs:

- Excessive drooling +/- blood tinged saliva
- Bad breath
- Discolored teeth
- Pawing at the face , mouth, or head
- Shaking the head
- Chattering teeth
- Chewing on one side of the mouth/dropping food while eating
- Difficulty swallowing
- Decreased appetite
- Preferring only wet food
- Swallowing dry food whole - refusing to chew food
- Loose or missing teeth

With human dental disease we mostly see tooth decay and cavities. Whereas with feline dental disease, we see gingivitis, stomatitis, periodontal disease, and tooth resorption.

Gingivitis refers to inflammation and infection along the gums, caused by a buildup of plaque. Stomatitis refers to inflammation of the mucous membranes within the mouth; this may include the gums, tongue, inner surfaces of the lips, the roof of the mouth, and in severe cases it may extend down the throat. The cause of stomatitis is believed to be an overreaction of the immune system in response to bacterial plaque. Periodontal disease describes infection and associated inflammation of the periodontium (the tissues surrounding the tooth). Four tissues comprise the periodontium: the gingiva (gums), the cementum (covering the root surface), the periodontal ligament (attaching the tooth root to the bone), and the bone surrounding the tooth. Tooth resorption is the slow, progressive destruction of the tooth (crown and root), resulting in "holes" in the affected teeth. Once sensitive parts of the tooth are exposed (dentin and pulp), these lesions become intensely painful, and the only effective and humane treatment is to extract the tooth. While the cause of this disease is unknown, poor oral hygiene can play a role in the disease process.

Cats are very good at hiding their ailments, and dental disease is no exception. Once your cat starts showing signs of dental disease, it means that it has progressed past the point of being reversible with antibiotics and at-home brushing. This means your cat will need a dental cleaning, performed by a veterinary professional. A dental cleaning will scale and polish all of the teeth, removing all of the accumulated tartar. Any loose, broken, or teeth with resorptive lesions will be removed at this time as well.

Luckily, dental disease can be prevented in your feline companion with daily brushing of their teeth. You can help train your cat to accept toothbrushing by rubbing a cotton swab dipped in tuna juice on your cat's teeth. While the tuna juice has no beneficial dental cleaning effects, it helps your cat positively associate the tuna juice and the toothbrushing

experience. Make sure when brushing your cat's teeth you are using a feline-specific toothpaste, as human toothpaste can be toxic to cats. There are toothbrushes specifically made for cats as well. If your cat does not tolerate brushing, have no fear, there are some other options to help reduce the plaque in your cat's mouth. There are water additives, treats, and diets that can reduce tartar accumulation. The Veterinary Oral Health Council evaluates dental products for effectiveness, and their seal of acceptance will only be found on products that have been shown to reduce the accumulation of plaque and/or tartar.