



## *Overview of Your Pet's Dental Health & Our Dental Services*

### **Signs & Signals of Dental Problems**

#### **Bad Breath**

Foul breath, often caused by bacteria living in your pet's mouth, is often the first sign of dental problems.

#### **Drooling**

Drooling can at times indicate that there is irritation in the mouth, and could be a sign of dental problems.

#### **Plaque**

This difficult-to-see soft layer of food and proteins is easy to remove with regular brushing, but returns quickly.

#### **Calculus**

This yellowish-brown crust, also commonly called tartar, is a crust of food particles, bacteria, and minerals that build up at the gum line.

#### **Gingivitis**

Red and swollen gums, or pain and bleeding when your pet eats or her gums are touched, is commonly caused by bacteria in the calculus. This is the first stage of periodontal disease.

### **Decreased Interest in Food**

If your pet's mouth hurts, she may avoid the pain: not showing an interest in regular meals or treats, or no longer chewing toys that had been previously interesting, can be a sign of dental pain.

**Loose, cracked, or missing teeth** – This is an obvious sign that periodontal disease is progressing, and should be addressed as soon as possible to prevent discomfort and pain, development of abscesses, or infection and further complications.

## **Dental Services & Procedures**

### **Pre-Anesthetic Screening Exam**

At Ballard Animal Hospital, your pet's health and well-being is the top priority. To ensure your pet's safety and minimize risks associated with anesthesia, a full screening is performed. This screening includes a physical examination of your pet, as well as blood testing. After the exam to assess your pet's dental health, a plan for the dental procedure is developed and discussed with you. Of course, should any treatment or procedures beyond the initial plan be indicated and recommended by the veterinarian, we will keep in contact with you to make sure you are fully involved in your pet's care.

### **Anesthesia**

In order to perform a proper dental examination and cleaning, your pet is given general anesthesia. This anesthesia is administered in several stages, similar to surgical procedures for people. First, a drug to help your pet relax and to control pain is given. An intravenous catheter is placed, which gives direct venous access. Intravenous fluids will be given during the entire dental procedure, to help manage your pet's blood pressure. Next, a drug will be given intravenously which will further sedate your pet and allow for the final preparation. Last, a tube is placed in your pet's throat to allow for inhalant anesthesia to be continuously and safely given to your pet throughout the procedure.

To ensure the well-being of your pet during the dental procedure, a medical staff member is always present specifically to monitor your pet's vital signs. Blood pressure, pulse rate, breathing rate, body temperature, and blood oxygen level are all monitored continuously. Your pet's reflexes are also monitored, to ensure that she is not emerging prematurely from anesthesia but at the same time is not so deeply anesthetized that complications may develop.

## **Cleaning and Scaling**

The next step in the dental procedure is a more thorough examination to identify specific problem areas in your pet's mouth that were not apparent during the pre-anesthetic screening exam. If necessary, injections can be administered with local anesthetic to control painful areas in your pet's mouth. These injections will both prevent your pet from waking prematurely and will also control her pain after the dental cleaning is complete. Then the cleaning begins: your pet's mouth will be rinsed with a disinfectant, and then the calculus is removed from your pet's teeth using an ultrasonic tool designed specifically for this purpose.

## **Assessment of Dental Health**

After the calculus (which can hide underlying problems) has been cleaned from your pet's teeth, the doctor does an in-depth examination of your pet's teeth and gums using special dental instruments. Unlike previous examinations of your pet's mouth during the dental procedure, this in-depth examination is focused on identifying problem areas in your pet's mouth that might require additional attention and to diagnose specific issues. If dental pockets or other abnormalities are noted, digital x-rays of the area(s) will be taken; the doctor uses these x-rays as an additional tool to assess each tooth's health and determine if the tooth should be extracted or what additional treatment might be required to address the problems identified.

## **Tooth Extraction**

The doctor reviews x-rays to assist with identifying infection, physical damage (such as cracks), and other abnormalities that can cause your pet discomfort or create problems. When the doctor determines that a tooth needs to be extracted, special instruments will be used to make the tooth extraction as pain-free as possible for your pet. Depending on which tooth is extracted, stitches (which dissolve after a few days) may be put in, to minimize irritation to the area, and to minimize complications.

## **Final Polishing and Recovery**

At the end of the dental procedure, your pet's teeth are polished. This step removes any microscopic scratches from your pet's teeth, and prevents new calculus from adhering to your pet's teeth. The whole mouth is then rinsed and dried.

The dental procedure is finished! Your pet is moved to a quiet area; we will continue to monitor her vital signs throughout the day while she rests and recovers from the anesthesia.

By incorporating a program of home dental care and regular professional cleanings, your pet can have healthier teeth and gums. How long your pet's teeth remain clean after the professional dental procedure depends on things you cannot control, such as your pet's breed (some breeds have a genetic tendency toward dental problems), your pet's dental alignment, and the amount of damage (broken teeth and receding gums) that may have already occurred. Some things, however, you are able to manage in order to help enhance your pet's dental health. Also, home care - brushing or other preventive steps - plays a large role in your pet's long-term dental health. Go to [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org) to find dental treats and other products that have proven to help with dental health.

## **Tooth Brushing and Oral Care at Home**

Regular tooth brushing is the best method of home dental care. Many toothpaste products specifically for pets are available. The toothpaste helps neutralize mouth odors and has enzymes or antibacterial properties to prevent plaque accumulation. Finger toothbrushes can be used to introduce your pet to tooth brushing, and specially designed toothbrushes with soft bristles that fit your pet's mouth are available as well.

First, let your pet get used to the taste of the toothpaste. Using the right toothpaste isn't as important as the physical act of brushing your pet's teeth - but at this stage, you just want your pet to get used to having your hands near her mouth. Offer her a small amount on the tip of your finger and praise her as she licks it off, followed by a really tasty treat. (You can also try a small amount of chicken broth on your finger instead of toothpaste if your pet doesn't like the smell or taste of the toothpaste.) Do a few of these sessions for a few days in a row, until your pet seems comfortable and enjoys the process.

Next, get your pet used to having something placed against her teeth and gums. Apply a small amount of paste to your finger and gently put it on one of her large teeth. Again, be sure to praise your pet and give tasty treats. (Remember, you are trying to teach your pet that brushing teeth is fun and enjoyable.) If your pet seems comfortable with this step you can gently rub your finger against her tooth for a few seconds.

After your pet is comfortable with you touching her mouth and teeth and is accustomed to the taste and feel of the toothpaste, get her used to the toothbrush you will be using. Allow her to look at, smell, and taste the toothbrush. She might not like the texture of the bristles at first, so let her lick a small amount of toothpaste or chicken broth off of it. Again, praise your pet and

give her some tasty treats. Repeat this step until it seems routine and enjoyable for your pet.

Now that she's used to her teeth and gums being touched, using the toothpaste, and the toothbrush itself, it's time to start brushing. Lift her upper lip gently and place the toothbrush at a 45 angle to the gum line. Gently move the brush back and forth. Stop here and give more tasty treats to your pet. Repeat this for a few days until your pet seems comfortable. Gradually increase the number of teeth you are brushing, until you are able to brush all the teeth in her mouth.

Remember, patience is the key: move slowly, and always make sure that tooth brushing remains a positive experience for your pet. Daily brushing is ideal, but for many people this option might not be realistic. Just remember that the more often your pet's teeth are brushed, the better it is for her health.