

Dental Disease in dogs and cats

Dental disease is the most common infectious disease of our pets. Over 80% of cats and dogs over the age of three require dental treatment, but their owners are unaware that their pets have a problem or are indeed in pain. The majority of dental problems are **treatable** and nearly all are **preventable** – we carry out free dental health checks at the surgery as part of our **preventative health care** regime.

Signs of dental disease - Our pets are very good at hiding the fact that they are in pain. They could just be a bit quieter than usual or more withdrawn. Many of us know the pain associated with mouth ulcers and some of us will have had the misfortune of experiencing a tooth root abscess. The nerve supply to our pet's teeth is just like ours so they feel the same level of pain that we do with dental disease. Often it is only when we see an improvement or change in behaviour after effective dental treatment that we realise that our pet may have been suffering.

Signs of dental pain in dogs and cats can include:

- **Reluctance to play** - loss of interest in chewing or playing with toys. Often a gradual change so you may think that your pet has simply got bored with a particular toy.
- **Reluctance to eat** - only in extreme cases of dental disease will your pet stop eating, although you may notice earlier changes such as:
 - favouring one side of the mouth
 - dropping food from the mouth when eating
 - difficulty in picking food up
 - reluctance to chew on dry food
- **Pawing at the mouth** - occasionally mouth pain can cause a pet to scratch or rub at their mouth, sometimes enough to cause bleeding.
- **Pain on examination** - reluctance to allow examination of the mouth can indicate pain. A painful swelling on the side of the face could be associated with a tooth root abscess. If your pet's mouth is very painful, we may need to use a sedative or anaesthetic to examine the mouth properly.
- **Bad breath (Halitosis)** - bacteria present with dental disease produce a chemical which makes the rotten smell associated with some dental problems. These chemicals are also toxic to other tissues, causing damage to organs such as the heart or kidneys.
- **Loose teeth** - teeth have a very strong attachment into the jaw bone. For a tooth to become loose it means that disease has destroyed significant amounts of ligament and/or bone.
- **Salivation** - your pet can drool saliva due to increased production, which happens when mouth ulcers are present, or because of a reluctance to swallow if the mouth hurts.

- **Fur staining** - drooling of discoloured saliva can cause staining of the fur around the muzzle or front legs.

- **Redness** - inflammation of the gums causes an increased blood supply which gives the red colour we associate with gingivitis or stomatitis (inflammation of the gums or mouth)



- **Bleeding** - as inflammation progresses, blood vessels weaken, causing the gums to bleed easily.

- **Broken/fractured teeth** - fractured teeth eventually die if the pulp chamber is exposed. Initially there can be bleeding from the pulp and acute pain. As the pulp dies, your pet will have grumbling low grade pain. A tooth root abscess can also develop, causing acute pain. Any fractured tooth is likely to need extraction or endodontic (root canal) treatment.



- **Calculus/tartar build up** - lumps of calculus (tartar) on the teeth do not cause disease, but the bacteria that live on the surface of the calculus do. This is why calculus is usually associated with gingivitis.



- **Swelling in the mouth** - any swelling inside the mouth must be checked by a vet and investigated further.



- **Swelling on the face** – this is often linked to a tooth root abscess.

- **General ageing** - if you think your pet is 'just getting older' have their mouth checked. It may be that they are more lethargic because of the effects of dental disease. The phrase 'He's like a puppy (or kitten) again' is often said by clients a week after proper dental treatment has been carried out. This can be the clearest indication of just how much the dental disease has been affecting your pet's overall health and comfort.

If you notice any of these signs in your pet, please call us to arrange a free dental check - don't let your pet suffer in silence.

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