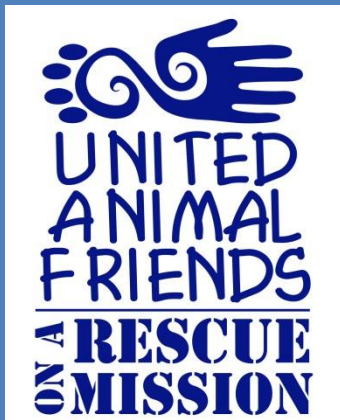


Dental Disease in Cats

Dental disease is one of the most common medical conditions seen by veterinarians.

Approximately two-thirds of cats over three years of age have some degree of dental disease.



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What kinds of dental problems do cats have?

Dental disease is common in cats, just as in humans. The most common form of dental disease in humans is cavities. This is not the case in cats. The most common form of feline dental disease is tartar buildup. This causes irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth, resulting in exposure of the roots. Ultimately, this leads to infection and tooth loss.

Doesn't dry cat food prevent tartar buildup?

There are many misconceptions about tartar buildup in cats. Diet plays less of a role than most people think. Because dry food is not as sticky as canned food it does not adhere to the teeth as much, so it does not cause tartar buildup as rapidly. However, eating dry food does not remove tartar from teeth. Once tartar forms, a professional cleaning is necessary.

One of the main factors determining the amount of tartar buildup is the individual chemistry in the mouth. Some cats need yearly cleanings; other cats need only one every few years.

What does tartar do to the teeth?

If tartar is allowed to remain on the teeth, several things may happen:

1. The tartar will mechanically push the gums away from the roots of the teeth. This allows the teeth to loosen in their sockets and infection to enter the root socket. The teeth will loosen and fall out or need to be extracted.
2. Infection will accumulate in the mouth, resulting in gingivitis (gums), tonsillitis and pharyngitis (sore throat). Although antibiotics may temporarily suppress the infection, if the tartar is not removed from the teeth, infection will return quickly.
3. Infection within the mouth will be picked up by the bloodstream and carried to other parts of the body. Kidney and heart infections frequently begin in the mouth.

What is involved in cleaning my cat's teeth?

Proper cleaning of the teeth requires complete anesthesia of the patient so plaque and tartar can be removed properly. Depending on your cat's age and general health, blood may be analyzed prior to anesthesia to evaluate blood cell counts and organ functions.

There are four steps in the cleaning process that will be used:

1. Scaling removes the tartar above and below the gum line. This is done with hand instruments and ultrasonic cleaning equipment.
2. Polishing smooths the surface of the teeth, making them resistant to additional plaque formation.
3. Flushing removes dislodged tartar from the teeth and helps to remove the bacteria that accompany tartar.
4. Fluoride coating decreases teeth sensitivity, strengthens enamel and decreases the rate of further plaque formation.