



76 Beech Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452
(802) 878-6888 voice
www.vtvets.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Linda Waite-Simpson, Executive Director
802-878-6888
info@vtvets.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 2023

February is National Pet Dental Health Month
by
M. Kathleen Shaw DVM

February is National Pet Dental Health Month, and the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association wants to remind pet owners that dental disease affects dogs and cats much the same as humans. Bad breath can be a sign of dental disease and possibly other serious health problems as well. When tartar accumulates on your pets' teeth, it pushes up under the gums and causes infection, pain, and that horrible smell you notice when your pet wants to lick your face. What's more, dental disease is painful, and your dog or cat will not cry out or stop eating to show you it hurts. (After all, the alternative is to starve.)

By the age of just three, about 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats have some form of dental disease. It may sound young, but remember, dogs and cats age faster than humans. Many of these pets have periodontal disease (infection around the tooth roots and surrounding bone), which—if left untreated—can lead to abscesses, pain, and ultimately loss of the teeth.

You can help your pet by keeping an eye out for clues that something is wrong. Although most dental disease occurs below the gumline—where you can't see it—you may notice red, swollen gums, bad breath, teeth that are broken, loose, abnormally colored, or covered in tartar, abnormal chewing, drooling, or dropping food, bleeding or swelling in or around the mouth, shying away from you when you try to pet its head or seeming bothered when you touch the face area, or frequent pawing or rubbing at the face or mouth.

It's never too late to start taking care of your pet's teeth. Routine cleanings by your veterinarian can help prevent or treat periodontal disease, saving you money and your pet pain in the long run. Cleanings also allow for complete examination of the mouth, to look for hidden health problems. Your veterinarian can advise you how often your pet should have a dental cleaning. Be aware that the 'cleaning' that some groomers and pet stores provide is not recommended (or legal in some states) and does not address the disease present where it occurs the most: under the gumline.

In between cleanings, brushing your pet's teeth is a great way to remove plaque and help prevent tartar. Not every pet will allow this, though! For a video on how to brush your pet's teeth, go to YouTube and choose the American Kennel Club's How to Brush Your Dog's Teeth video. Cat owners in particular may breathe a sigh of relief to know there are also many pet products that don't involve brushing the teeth. Look for a seal of approval from the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC), and visit their website at vohc.org for a list of approved products for dogs and cats (both veterinary or over the counter).

Visit the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) website at <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/petcare/pet-dental-care> to learn more about dental health and for a variety of materials to show you how you can improve the dental (and overall) health of your pets.

###

The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.