

Dental disease in dogs

Dogs are extremely prone to gum disease and excess tartar build-up on the teeth. Food particles and bacteria collect along the gumline forming plaque. Routine home care can remove this plaque.

Minerals in the saliva combine with the plaque and form tartar (or calculus) which adheres strongly to the teeth. Tartar starts to mineralize 3-5 days after it forms. The tartar is irritating to the gums and causes inflammation or gingivitis. This can be seen as reddening of the gums bordering the teeth. It also causes bad breath. At this point it is necessary to remove the tartar with special instruments called and then polish the teeth.



If the tartar is not removed, it builds up under the gums. It separates the gums from the teeth to form "pockets" and encourages even more bacterial growth. At this point the damage is irreversible. Periodontal Disease can be very painful and can lead to loose teeth, abscesses, and bone loss or infection. As bacterial growth continues to increase, the bacteria may enter the bloodstream. This can cause infection of the heart valves (endocarditis), liver and kidneys. If treated by your veterinarian with special instruments and procedures, periodontal disease can be slowed or stopped.

What is included in a good dental care program?

A good dental care program includes:

- Regular visits to your veterinarian, which include an oral exam
- Veterinary dental cleaning as advised
- Daily home oral care

Oral Exams by Your Veterinarian: A thorough dental exam can identify potential problems such as plaque and tartar build-up, gingivitis, periodontal disease, and fractured or abscessed teeth. During an oral exam your veterinarian will:

- Examine the face and head for asymmetry, swelling, or discharges.
- Examine the oral cavity, oral mucosa, and surfaces of teeth and gums.
- Open the mouth to examine the inner surfaces of the teeth and gums and the tongue, palates, oral mucosa, tonsils, and ventral tongue area.
- Palpate and assess the size, shape, and consistency of the salivary glands and the lymph nodes in the neck.

Dental Cleaning by Your Veterinarian: To prevent dental disease, your dog needs routine dental care at home. But to perform good home care, you need to start with clean teeth. Brushing will remove plaque but not tartar. So if your dog's teeth have tartar, it is necessary for your veterinarian to remove it and polish the teeth. This professional veterinary dental cleaning is also called a prophylaxis or "prophy." A routine dental cleaning at Woodland West Pet Care Centers consists of:

- Anesthetizing your dog
- Placing an endotracheal tube into the trachea to assist breathing and to protect your pet from aspirating (breathing vomitus or particles)
- Cleaning the teeth with handheld and ultrasonic scalers. All calculus is removed from above and **below the gumline**. This is extremely important and can only be done if the animal is under anesthesia.



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- Using a disclosing solution to show any areas of remaining calculus which are then removed.
- Polishing the teeth to remove microscopic scratches.
- Inspecting each tooth and the gum around it for any signs of disease.
- Optionally, applying a dental agent such as oravet, to retard plaque build up.
- Recording any abnormalities or additional procedures on a dental chart.
- Determining the best follow-up and home dental care program for your dog.

Daily Home Oral Care: Home oral care includes routine examinations of your dog's mouth and brushing her teeth as well as applying a home-care gel: oravet.

Daily brushing: Regular brushing of your dog's teeth is a very important preventive for oral and other diseases. A step-by-step procedure for providing this care is found in our article [Brushing Your Dog's Teeth](#).

Mechanical removal of plaque: Studies show that hard kibbles are slightly better at keeping plaque from accumulating on the teeth. There are veterinary dentist-approved foods and treats on the market that have shown that dogs eating these foods have less plaque and tartar build-up.

Canine products that have received the Veterinary Oral Health's Council seal of acceptance and are recommended and sold by Woodland West Pet Care Centers:

- (Hill's) Prescription Diet Canine t/d: Original & Small Bites
- Science Diet Oral Care Diet for Dogs
- C.E.T. Dental Reward Bones (Small, Large)

Mechanical removal of plaque can also be accomplished by using toys such as Plaque Attacker dental toys, rope toys, or rawhide chips. Do not use toys that are abrasive and can wear down the teeth. If your dog is an aggressive chewer and likes to bite down, trying to crack the toy, you probably should not let the dog chew on that toy. For especially aggressive chewers, look for toys they cannot get their mouths around. Rawhide or other chews that soften as the dog chews are another option.