

# Village Veterinary Practice



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## E-Newsletter

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### Hours

M—Th: 7:45am—5:30pm  
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Call for Saturdays  
House Calls Available

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## How to Keep Foul Breath at Bay

**D**iseases and disorders of the mouth can afflict any animal from your couch potato dog to the lion at the zoo. Proper dental hygiene should be a part of every pet owner's routine in order to ensure that your precious pet does not fall victim to dental disease.

According to Dr. Carol Akers, a veterinarian and dentistry resident at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Urbana, it is important to understand that bad breath in a pet is not normal. Unless Fido has a bad habit of sneaking snacks from your cat's litter box, his foul breath is a sure sign that something is wrong in his mouth.

The most common problem that veterinarians see in pets is periodontal disease. This is characterized by the loss of the supporting structure of the tooth. Without a proper dental hygiene regimen in place, your pet's teeth will quickly become covered in plaque, a sticky biofilm of bacteria and bacterial by-products. Brushing your pet's teeth daily will remove this film; however if left on the surface of the teeth the plaque will mineralize and harden to form tartar.

The dangerous part of periodontal disease comes not from the tartar itself but from the bacteria that is attracted to it. When tartar pushes up above the gum line, the bacteria moves with it and is able to eat away at the surface of the tooth, the gum surrounding the tooth, and the bone holding the tooth in place. The infection and tissue damage that results from the bacteria is what brings about the foul breath that many owners are plagued with.

As always, prevention is the best medicine when it comes to dental disease. The best way to keep your pet's mouth free and clear of infection is to brush his teeth daily, just as you would your own.

"Imagine what your teeth would look and feel like if they were only brushed once or twice a month, or even never brushed at all," says Dr. Akers. "Daily brushing is the absolute best way to prevent periodontitis and other dental diseases."

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## How to Keep Foul Breath at Bay

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According to Dr. Akers, the key of tooth brushing is to mechanically remove the plaque and food particles that build up on the surface of the teeth throughout the day. A wide range of tooth brushes and tooth paste flavors are available for pet owners looking to keep their pets' smiles sparkling. When brushing your pet's teeth, it is important to use toothpaste that is made specifically for pets since the fluoride and other chemicals in human toothpastes are toxic to animals.

Of course if your pet absolutely will not allow you to brush his teeth, then the next step would be providing safe chew toys that will help to remove plaque build-up on the surface of the teeth. When picking out a chew toy for your pet it is important to pick one that will clean the teeth without damaging them. If the item is too hard the animal can actually chip or break a tooth.

"My rule for chew toys is that if you can pound a nail with it, the toy is too hard for your dog's teeth, which means bones, be they real, plastic, or nylon, should never be given to a pet," explains Dr. Akers.

Besides tooth brushing and chew toys, there are a variety of antiseptic mouth washes and specially-designed treats and foods that you can use to help care for your pet's teeth. Owners should begin using these preventative measures as soon as they bring their new pet home. In the case of puppies and kittens, it is also important to monitor how the animal's adult teeth are coming in and whether the deciduous (baby) teeth are falling out normally.

"If you notice that your pet has retained any baby teeth it is important to have those teeth removed immediately," says Dr. Akers. "If those teeth are allowed to stay in they will permanently alter the position of the adult teeth, which can be an extremely painful condition for the pet to live with."

Even with the best preventative care, it is still likely that your pet will need to have some dental work done in his lifetime. In order to recognize when it is time for your pet to visit the vet, it is important to watch for signs such as bad breath, excessive drooling, loss of interest in chewing or playing, and swelling on the face or around the eyes. These are all signs and symptoms of various painful dental diseases that require immediate veterinary attention.

For more information about dental health for your pet, contact your local veterinarian.

Sarah Dowling, Information Specialist—University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine

# Pet Dental Health: frequently asked questions

Periodontal disease is one of the most common AND preventable diseases in dogs and cats. It is estimated that 80% of dogs and cats over the age of 2 have some degree of periodontal disease. While practicing at home dental care is a great way to keep your pet's teeth healthy, a professional dental cleaning will be necessary at some point for the majority of our patients. When a professional dental cleaning is recommended, we understand that you may have questions and concerns regarding the procedure. In this issue of our newsletter, we would like to take the opportunity to answer some of the most frequently asked questions regarding pet dental cleanings.

## 1 Why does a dental cleaning need to be done under anesthesia?

Essentially, your pet's professional dental cleaning mimics the same cleaning process done on your teeth. Now, imagine that processes and remember how still you are when your teeth are being cleaned. Unfortunately, our patients are not able to remain absolutely still when they are awake, and therefore must be anesthetized in order to have a thorough, professional dental cleaning.



## 2 My cat is 16 years old; isn't she too old to be anesthetized for a dental cleaning?

NO. Age is simply a number, not a clear indicator of the overall health of an animal or person. Prior to our patients undergoing any type of anesthesia, the pet's physical condition must be evaluated as well as internal organ function. If those components are favorable, there is no reason why anesthesia can not be performed.

It is important to mention that there is always risk with anesthesia, however, pre-anesthetic work-up is essential and our trained staff monitor our patients throughout every stage of the anesthetic process. Additionally, the benefits of a professional dental cleaning far outweigh the low anesthetic risk.



## 3 Will the dental cleaning be painful?

A routine dental cleaning without extractions is not painful. However, in the event of a tooth extraction, local nerve blocks are performed (just like human dentistry), injectable pain medication is given in the hospital and oral pain medication is sent home. Managing your pet's pain is very important to us, after all, no one wants to be in pain.

## Pet Dental Health: frequently asked questions

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### 4 What is involved in a dental cleaning?

First, a thorough physical exam and pre-anesthetic lab work will be done to determine the health of the patient. An anesthetic plan will be customized and intravenous catheter will be placed. Your pet will then receive a pre-anesthetic medication to help him relax and allow for a smooth anesthetic procedure. Intravenous fluids will be administered to keep your pet hydrated and help maintain adequate blood pressure.

After the patient has been anesthetized, the plaque and tartar will be removed both above and below the gum line using an instrument called a scaler. Following the dental cleaning, each tooth is evaluated by for stability, deep pockets along the gums, root exposure, and other abnormalities. Each tooth is then individually polished with a low speed polisher to smooth the tooth's enamel.

Patients are continuously monitored during and after anesthesia, and vitals such as Heart Rate, Respiration Rate, Blood Pressure, Body Temperature, and Blood Oxygen Concentration are observed and recorded.

Patients are sent home that afternoon and all instructions will be discussed in the patient's scheduled discharge appointment.

### 5 Why are antibiotics sent home after a dental cleaning?

One gram of plaque contains one trillion bacteria! (One gram is equivalent to ¼ teaspoon).

During your pet's dental cleaning, the bacteria will circulate within the mouth, under the gums and can travel into the bloodstream. To avoid any infections, an antibiotic injection is given the morning of your pet's dental cleaning as well as being sent home.

For patients that have a systemic disease (heart, liver, or kidney), antibiotics are usually started 3 days prior to the dental cleaning to protect these already impaired organs.



### 6 How often do I need to get my pet's teeth professionally cleaned?

Each time your pet comes in for a physical exam (that should be at least once a year), your veterinarian will perform an oral examination and advise you if a professional dental cleaning is needed. Breed, genetics, and at home care all play a role in determining how often this procedure will need to be performed. It is best to have your pet's teeth professionally cleaned during the early stages of the disease to prevent pain and tooth loss.



# Are You Ready for Spring Break?

Though our winter has been relatively mild so with minimal subzero days and modest snowfall, many of us are longing for Spring to get here. And for some, Spring really doesn't start until Spring Break!



If you are planning a Spring Break getaway without the company of your four legged family members, don't wait until the last minute to think about pet care arrangements. There are many options for pet care—the traditional boarding facility, the boarding facility with the bonus option of day-care, pet resorts, the pet-sitter that stays in your home, the petsitter that simply visits your home, or the petsitter that watches animals in his or her home.

Regardless of which option you choose, Spring Break is a popular vacation time so be sure to make your reservations early.

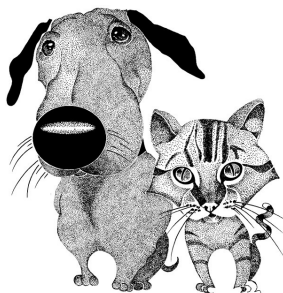
With any pet care facility we strongly advise taking the time to tour the site and discuss how your pet will be cared for while you are away. After all, the last thing you want to be worrying about when you are on vacation is whether or not your pet is being taken care of properly.

When you find the venue that you feel most comfortable with, find out what the immunization and parasite screening requirements are and then verify with VVP that your pet is up to date.

If you pet is lacking on any of his inoculations, schedule an appointment with one of our veterinarians at least two weeks prior to your departure date. This will ensure that your pet's body has had adequate time to reach the appropriate immunity level.

Finally, make sure to leave your emergency contact information, veterinary treatment authorization, and VVP's phone number with your pet care provider just in case of an emergency.

After all that, go on and have a great vacation!



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## The Village Veterinary Practice Vision

Village Veterinary Practice was founded with the belief that companion animals deserve the best quality of life possible. Our vision is inspired by our patients, the devotion of their human families and the commitment of our veterinarians. It is sustained by the contributions of our compassionate, knowledgeable and dedicated staff and built upon a strong tradition of providing unsurpassed veterinary care for companion animals.

## The Village Veterinary Practice Mission

Village Veterinary Practice was established to care for your pet as a family member. By utilizing the latest medical advances, sound guidance and desire, we strive to make the family pet bond an enjoyable, healthy and life enriching experience.