

## FACTSHEET

### Feline dental care

Estimates vary but they all agree that most cats will get some form of dental disease in their lifetime. Cats can get a variety of problems such as build up of tartar, fractured teeth or gum disease that can lead to infection and subsequent tooth loss and pain. But with proper care of your cat's teeth, you can help to avoid some of these problems.

#### What does dental disease look like?

You might notice:

- Bad breath
- Loss of appetite
- Yellow/brown tartar on teeth
- Reddened or bleeding gums
- Drooling
- Missing teeth
- Pawing at the mouth

If your cat has any of these symptoms, or you have difficulty examining your cat's mouth, you should consult your veterinarian as soon as possible. Bacteria from plaque can cause infection in your cat's vital organs: dental health is essential to good health.

#### Dental diets and treats

A relatively simple way to reduce the risk of tooth problems is to feed specifically designed cat foods, such as Hill's Science Diet Oral Care. These cat biscuits help to reduce plaque and tartar, leaving your cat's teeth cleaner and their breath fresher.

Don't suddenly change your cat's diet as this can upset their stomach. Any dietary changes should be slowly transitioned, and biscuits such as Oral Care, which are complete and balanced nutrition, can form a part of your cat's normal daily diet. Treats such as Greenies are designed with dental care in mind and can also help prevent dental disease.

Some people like to give their cats raw bones but be very careful as these can shatter, and they can present a choking hazard. You should never let your cat eat bones unsupervised. There are other risks associated with raw meat so consult your veterinarian if this is something you're considering for your cat.

### **Brushing your cat's teeth**

Depending on your cat's temperament, brushing your cat's teeth can be an option. It's important to consult your vet first, as your cat's dental health needs to be considered in whether, how, and how often, you brush your cat's teeth.

Your vet or vet nurse will be able to show you how to brush your cat's teeth in a stress-free way (but remember, some cats simply won't tolerate it at all). It is best to start gradually, using a pet finger toothbrush or gauze around your finger to familiarise your cat with the feeling of having their gums and teeth touched.

Be sure to provide positive reinforcement by using treats or toys. Over time, more teeth can be brushed, and pet toothpaste can be incorporated to increase the effectiveness of brushing. NEVER use human toothpaste; it will make your cat sick.

Tooth brushing is something many cats will not enjoy. If your cat seems stressed during brushing, don't persist.

### **Water additives**

There are also products on the market that can be safely added to your cat's water to decrease plaque and tartar build-up. However, it is important to slowly introduce these to ensure your cat still drinks enough water with these additives.

### **Regular veterinary dental clean**

Yearly dental health checks are highly recommended and are easy to schedule with your cat's yearly vaccination and general health check. Senior cats should have six-monthly check-ups.

If your cat has early-stage dental disease, your vet might recommend a 'scale and polish' under general anaesthesia. During this process vets will thoroughly remove tartar using an ultrasonic scaler and polish any unevenness of the tooth surface. If your cat has chipped teeth or baby teeth that haven't fallen out, they might also need extractions.

Follow your veterinarian's advice after any dental procedure as your cat might not be able to eat normally for a little while afterwards.

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