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Dental Disease Prevention

Over the last ten years, veterinarians have become increasingly aware of the benefits of dental care. Research has proven the effects of some products and therapies, whereas others have only made claims to the benefits of products. We would like you to choose the best method below for your individual pet. Not all pets are created equal when it comes to dental disease. Each program must be tailored to the individual. One pet may love the flavor of toothpaste while another may make a simple tooth brushing into a wrestling match. My staff and I can guide you in your choices based on how severe the condition is and on your pet's personality.

The benefits are too numerous to count but they include better breath, less dental pain, less anesthetic procedures to clean the teeth and therefore less cost to you, less infections throughout the body and your pet retains his teeth longer, helping him to eat. Starting early is the key. A young animal will learn that this is a normal part of life and be more compliant with you.

1.) Brushing

This can be done with a basic brush, a thimble brush, or gauze pads. The basic premise is that you manually remove the build-up each day. This has been proven to be the best method to date. Your pet must start with clean teeth which may require a thorough cleaning by our staff. Then you begin with daily application of paste, holding the brush at a 45 degree angle to the gum line, rotating the brush in a circular manner. Pet toothpaste is a must. It comes in flavors like beef, chicken and tuna which make it more palatable to animals. Pet toothpaste is also balanced for a pet, so as not to irritate an animal's gums or cause vomiting like human toothpaste would do to a pet.

2.) Diet Change

Pet food companies have created diets (Hill's Prescription Diet t/d) to help with the mechanical removal of the tartar on a daily basis. This is the easiest choice of all, but please ask our staff if this is an acceptable change for your pet because many pets are already on a prescription diet for another medical condition which may have greater importance.

3.) Bones and Chew Toys

These can cause significant changes in your pet's teeth. Most bones and chews work well. Be careful to choose a treat that is low in calories (10% of the calorie intake for your pet) and a treat that is large enough that it cannot be swallowed and get stuck in their belly. CET, a dental products company, has designed rawhides with enzymes that help to degrade the tartar further. Greenies is another company that has manufactured chew bones specifically made to freshen your dog's breath and provide

manual removal of tartar from the teeth.

4.) Oral Rinses

These products decrease the number of bacteria in the mouth which build the plaque. They can get to the hard to reach areas and seem to be quite effective. We prefer products that contain Chlorhexidine 0.2%. Other beneficial compounds include hexametaphosphate and pyrophosphate which bind calcium (the major component to tartar) and prevent its incorporation into tartar. There is also a water additive that can be used daily without altering the taste of your pet's water to deter drinking. This product makes dental care quite easy for us.

5.) Antibiotics

Should your pet's dental condition be severe enough, we may suggest "pulse antibiotic therapy." This would require you to give small doses of antibiotics every month to decrease the bacterial overgrowth in the mouth. In addition, you prevent the spread of these organisms from the gums to other susceptible organs in the body (heart, lungs, kidneys, etc.)

Tips on Toothbrushing:

To be effective, tooth brushing should be done once or twice daily for a minute or two. Finally after brushing, do something fun with your pet so that he or she will associate the experience with something positive.

Getting Started:

For the first few sessions do not use a brush at all. Hold your pet as if you are cuddling. Gently stroke the cheeks with your finger. Progress over time to a wash cloth or gauze dipped in chicken broth or tuna juice to wipe the gums and teeth. Once you've mastered this process you are ready to move on to an actual brush. Hold the brush at a 45 degree angle to the gum, and apply just a dab of pet toothpaste. Begin to brush the teeth and gumline in an oval motion, concentrating on small sections at a time. Ideally, you should build up to about 30 seconds on each side of the mouth. Tarter develops on the outer surfaces of the rear teeth, so special attention should be given to these areas.

Try to make tooth care as pleasurable as possible for all concerned. Proceed slowly and gently, and use a calm, soothing voice. Stop each session while it is still fun and lavish your furry friend with praise afterward. Pretty soon he/she will begin to look forward to oral hygiene.

Taking just two minutes a day to care for your pet's teeth can give them a lifetime of health benefits. Routine home care significantly reduces tooth loss, dental disease, bad breath, and potential life threatening heart and kidney disease.

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