

Why is Dental Health Important?

Periodontal (i.e. gum) disease is the most common disease seen in dogs and cats. According to studies performed by the Australian and American Veterinary Dental Societies, more than 70% of cats and 80% of dogs develop gum disease by the age of three years.

Unhealthy gums can be extremely painful. Dogs and cats don't always show us that they are in pain, in part because it develops gradually, but also because showing weakness is something many try to avoid. Dental disease also affects more than just the mouth. Spread of mouth bacteria can result in problems in the kidneys, liver and heart.

Signs of Dental Disease

- Smelly breath
- Gums that are redder than normal, particularly around the edges of teeth
- Brown or yellow material visible on teeth (tartar)
- Reduced appetite
- Chewing difficulty
- Loss of interest in chewing toys
- Reluctance to eat harder foods
- Broken or loose teeth
- Drooling
- Pawing at the side of the face

Caring for your pet's teeth at home

Brushing Teeth

Teeth brushing is the best form of dental homecare. Toothbrushes and toothpaste which are specifically designed for pets are available to purchase commercially, and can be bought here at the clinic. Never use human toothpaste for a dog or cat.

It can take some time and patience to teach your pet to accept the toothbrush, but once they are accustomed to it, brushing their teeth should take no more than a minute a day. Brushing *every* day is highly recommended, but you will need to build up to this gradually in most pets.

Chewing

Chewing is also beneficial for your pets' teeth – and it's something most of them love to do. Studies have found some chew treats such as Greenies™, Oravet™ chews or Prozym™ chews are helpful when used

daily. Specially designed dental dry foods (e.g. Hills t/d™, Royal Canin Dental™) can also remove plaque from the teeth, as well as prevent further tartar from accumulating.

Chew toys can have undesirable effects on the teeth and many are ineffective at cleaning. Plastic toys are prone to breaking and rope toys can get stuck between teeth. Quality, strong rubber toys such as Kongs can be useful.

Chewing raw, meaty bones can be helpful in keeping teeth clean – as well as a very enjoyable pastime for some dogs. Their use is controversial however and there are many risks to consider. These include (but are not limited to) painful fractured teeth, constipation (or sometimes diarrhoea), pancreatitis, and fragments of bones stuck in the mouth, stomach or intestines.

If you wish to feed your dog raw bones, there are some important guidelines to follow:

- Use large bones – we want the dog to chew them, NOT eat them.
- Don't have the butcher cut them – not only are cut surfaces more likely to result in fractured teeth, but they also allow easy access to the fatty bone marrow, which can lead to pancreatitis in susceptible dogs.
- NEVER feed cooked bones. They are brittle and can splinter within the gastrointestinal tract leading to bowel perforations or blockages.
- Don't feed bones frozen – they are very hard and more likely to break teeth.
- Supervise pets while they are chewing bones.
- Throw away the bone when chewing is finished.
- Keep in mind that raw meat comes with associated health risks and practice careful hygiene.

Regular Dental Checks

We recommend regular dental checks for all pets, generally every 6 months is appropriate. At Croydon Pet Hospital we offer complimentary dental checks which are performed by our experienced nurses who can guide you with individualised recommendations for your pet or pick up issues requiring veterinary attention early. *Dental checks can be booked by calling us on 9727 4004.*