

Pet Project Feb '09

“Dog Breath, Cat Cavities, Ouch!

February is National Pet Dental Health month, and for good reason. Dental disease is by far the most commonly diagnosed illness of dogs and cats. Almost 80% of our pets over the age of 3 years have some form of dental disease.

Offensive Dog breath is not normal! That odor is most often due to an infection trapped under the gum line called gingivitis. In the earlier stages this infection can be completely reversed by a professional teeth cleaning. But left to progress, this common illness can result in gum recession, tooth socket bone loss, and eventually loss of teeth. This sequence of dental disease is not only uncomfortable, it is potentially life threatening. The infection around the teeth can easily enter the blood stream and severely damage the heart valves and especially the kidneys. Liver disease and high blood pressure are also linked to untreated dental problems in dogs, cats, and humans too.

Cats not only suffer from gum disease but also have their own unique form of cavities. Though not a true cavity in the sense that they are not caused by germs, a severe and extremely painful erosion often develops at the gum line and bores a hole right into the tooth. Upon reaching the sensitive nerve tissue inside, this process will continue and eventually weaken the crown to the point of breaking off. Ouch!! More than 30% of cats develop at least one of these Tooth Lesions during their lifetime. Weight loss, decreased appetite, breath odor, drooling, and behavior changes can all result from this problem – they hurt!

So what can a conscientious pet owner do to help? Step #1 is to have a professional oral exam to assess what your pet’s oral health status is. If a dental cleaning / oral evaluation is recommended, get it done! In almost all patients, the risk of anesthesia is by far less than allowing dental disease to progress.

If your pet has a healthy mouth, great, because Step #2 is establishing a home care routine to help keep it that way! By far the best routine is, same as for us, tooth brushing. With guidance many people are

able to establish a tooth brushing program, but there are many other options available now to help if you just can't brush. Dental diets, chew exercise products, and various anti-plaque gels are also available. Ask your veterinary health care team to help tailor a program for your pet's specific needs.

For more information please visit www.petdental.com and click on the pet owner option in the upper R hand box. You'll find interesting Dental Health Facts, an FAQ section and help on Home Dental Care as well.

Until next month, healthy pets, happy people! Dr Pat Mahoney

Dr. Pat Mahoney is the owner of American Animal Hospital in Neenah, an AAHA certified pet care clinic. To submit your pet related questions for a future column, go to the e-mail link at www.AmerAnimal.com