

Pets and People: Cricket Press January 31^s

Many of us consider our dogs and cats members of our family. We share companionship and a special bond that includes touching and close contact as a rewarding part of the relationship. Anything that diminishes this is a loss for pets and the people who love them. The disease entity I will discuss this week creates serious health risks; however, let's not forget that in addition to the health risks I will delineate, we also lose the benefits of that special kind of intimacy we share with them, and this is one of the legacies of bad breath.

There are several reasons why pets get “bad breath”. These include certain digestive conditions, diabetes, kidney disease and periodontal disease.

This week, I will discuss periodontal disease, which is the most commonly diagnosed threat to your pet’s health and the most common cause of bad breath. The sequella to this condition can affect your pet’s heart, liver and other organ systems. It is a disease which can be easily prevented, and it is a timely subject, as February is National Pet Dental Health Month.

The most common sign of Periodontal Disease is bad breath. This is caused by the accumulation of bacteria in the plaque that forms on the surface of the teeth. As time progresses, this combination of plaque and bacteria leads to an inflammation of the gums called gingivitis. If untreated, gingivitis will lead to periodontal disease, which destroys the gums and the tissues which support the teeth. These same bacteria can enter the bloodstream and migrate to the lining of the heart, the kidneys and the liver, causing inflammation and disease in those organs as well.

Periodontal disease is easily diagnosed and you can identify it by looking at your pet’s gums. Concentrate on the big canine teeth and the molars in the back of he mouth. The upper teeth are usually more affected than the lower. If the gums appear

red and swollen, your pet has gingivitis. In the early stages of periodontal disease you may only notice bad breath, but as it advances you may notice bleeding gums and some teeth with obvious infection. Your pet may also eat less, especially if on a dry food diet, and show signs of weight loss as a result. As we all know, dental disease is painful.

Left untreated, periodontal disease will diminish the quality of your pet's health, decrease his longevity and perhaps worse of all, interfere with the loving bond which is so important to both pet and people.

Now that we have discussed the downside of periodontal disease, let's consider what we can do to prevent it. If it has progressed to a certain point, your pet will require a dental cleaning and other prophylactic treatments. In advanced cases, some teeth may have to be extracted. Additionally, there are specially prepared antibiotic preparations that can be injected under the gums to help stop the advance of periodontal disease and save teeth. Once the mouth is returned to a healthy state, you can maintain the health of your pet's mouth by brushing the teeth, providing a diet created for dental health and by adding a tartar preventing product to the water.

Pet dental health is similar to our own. We practice periodic cleanings for the reasons mentioned above. When a dental "prophy" is recommended, your pet will require a general anesthetic and his teeth will be scraped, cleaned with an ultrasonic scaler and polished. **Theses procedures require general anesthetics. In a future column I will review the current status of anesthesia in veterinary medicine. However, it is a rare instance when a patient is better off not receiving the needed dental care on a timely basis.**

For a more comprehensive discussion of this subject, visit my website, www.manchestervet.com, under the encyclopedia heading “Dental Disease” in canines and felines.