

The Value of Dental Care

This is National Pet Dental Health Month. There is a very good reason for this and I will address this topic by answering the most common questions raised about Canine and Feline dental health care.

- 1. Why do veterinarians do dentistry on pets?**
- 2. Is the risk of anesthesia worth taking to clean the teeth?**
- 3. Why is anesthesia necessary?**
- 4. What is gingivitis and periodontal disease?**
- 5. What other parts of the body are affected by bad teeth?**

The second most important thing pet owners can do to protect the health, comfort and longevity of their companion animals is to perform dental prophylaxis when it is required. Dental care compares as a close second to having pets vaccinated against disease and tested for tick born disease in the Manchester by the Sea geographic area.

Veterinarians perform dental prophylaxis which includes pre-anesthetic blood tests for selected patients, anesthesia, EKG cardiac monitoring during the procedure, dental scraping, ultrasonic cleaning, polishing and sub-gingival application of antibiotics when required.

Anesthesia is required because the process requires very detailed work on the teeth and gums and a pet will not permit a comprehensive cleaning without the assistance of anesthesia. Without the use of anesthesia there would be discomfort and pain involved. In most clinics, the anesthetic is the same used in human hospitals.

The risk of anesthesia is very low. With the equipment employed and the safety measures taken, anesthesia on a healthy animal is now considered routine even on the aged pet. If you consider the risk of sepsis from an infected mouth and the havoc it plays on many organ systems, you will realize that anesthesia and dental care is a very safe

option. A greater risk is involved with the patient who requires anesthesia because of dental care deferred which could result in a compromised liver, kidney or heart.

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 leads to an inflammation of the gums called gingivitis, which turns into periodontal disease which can destroy the gums and the tissue which support the teeth. These same bacteria can enter the bloodstream and migrate to the lining of the heart, the kidneys and the liver.

Periodontal disease is easily diagnosed and you can identify it by looking at your pet's gums. Concentrate on the big canine tooth and the molars in the back of the 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 notice bad breath, but as it advances you may notice bleeding gums and some teeth with obvious infection.

Left untreated, periodontal disease will diminish the quality of a pet's health, decrease his longevity, cause pain and perhaps worse of all, interfere with the loving bond created over a lifetime. A pet with a diseased mouth will smell bad. Teeth will be lost prematurely. The foul odor created by this disease will result in less contact with a pet. Both the owner and the companion animal will lose some of the intimacy that is shared between a pet and the people who love him.

Your veterinarian can help you and your pet with advice on how to prevent and treat dental disease.

