



David D. Roberts, DVM, DABVP
Mary M. Stauder, DVM
Matthew S. Bechtel, DVM

THE STAGES OF DENTAL HEALTH

The care for your four-legged family member's teeth becomes the responsibility of "their best friend". Although we truly wish eating dry food alone would solve the problem, it is just not enough. Research has proven that milk bone type treats remove only 7% of the tartar. Rawhide chews can remove much more, but your pet would have to eat three chews a day creating an increased risk for anything from an upset stomach to a bona-fide intestinal obstruction.

We are all familiar with the bad breath problems and sensitive mouths that dental tartar can create. But this may only be the tip of the iceberg!! The odor and sensitivity come from bacteria trapped under the tartar and right against the billions of tiny blood vessels within the gum tissue. Bacteria showers the heart, kidneys and liver creating heart murmurs in the valves and the possibility of kidney and liver disease leading to organ failure and even a pet's demise.

Grading Your Pet's Teeth/Gums

When your veterinarian examines your pet's mouth, what is he or she looking for? The condition of your pet's teeth and gums are evaluated by the doctor and assigned a grade between 1 and 4. **As a general rule of thumb, your pet should have a dental prophylaxis when his/her teeth are between Grade 2 and Grade 3.**

Grade 1- Gingivitis

Your pet's gums will begin to appear inflamed and swollen around the edges and you will be able to visibly notice plaque covering the teeth. At this stage, a professional dental prophylaxis is probably not required and can potentially be further postponed by implementing home care such as brushing your pet's teeth multiple times a week to remove plaque before it hardens into tartar. Schedule a follow-up visit for 6 months to a year to check your pet's progress.

Grade 2 – Early Periodontitis

At grade 2, you will notice that nearly all of the pet's gum line is red and swollen. You may notice the start of mouth odor and your pet may begin experiencing some mouth discomfort. At this stage, a professional dental prophylaxis procedure is imminent. Pet should be scheduled for a dental prophylaxis or rechecked in 3 months to ensure that the dental disease has not progressed to a Grade 3.

Grade 3 – Moderate Periodontitis

Your pet's gums will appear bright red, and may bleed. You will notice an increase in mouth odor and your pet's mouth may be sore enough to cause a change in your pet's eating and behavior. At this stage, gum tissue may be destroyed by the infection so it is time to schedule the dental prophylaxis procedure! Not only is your pet's oral health at risk (loss of gum tissue) but bacteria can begin to migrate to other organs such as the kidneys, liver and heart.

Grade 4 – Advanced Periodontitis

At grade 4, your pet has a chronic bacterial infection that is destroying gum tissue, bone tissue and teeth. Bacteria is also spreading throughout his or her body causing damage to heart valves, kidneys, and the liver. It is now urgent that your pet have a professional dental prophylaxis and it is likely that there will be additional costs incurred due to tooth extractions. As a result of the systemic bacteria, your pet may also be at higher risk for sedation.

Dental Prophylaxis

Since only a professional cleaning can remove rock hard tartar, this is the place to start. Your pet will be sedated to allow a complete and careful cleaning. Pre-sedation blood work and intravenous fluids are recommended to reduce risk and ensure the safety and comfort of your pet. Not only will the visible tartar be removed, but the dangerous accumulations below the gum line will be removed by hand and then all tooth surfaces will be polished. As a final precaution, OraVet Plaque Prevention Gel, a barrier sealant, is applied to protect the newly cleaned teeth and slow the reforming of plaque. After the procedure, antibiotics may be used to eliminate any mobilized bacteria.