

## **Ask the Vet: February is National Pet Dental Health Month!**

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Have you ever thought of the health of your pet's mouth and teeth? Or do you just notice that Fido always has stinky doggy breath? Just as in people, a healthy mouth and clean teeth are important for your pet's overall health. It is estimated that by the age of two, 80% of dogs and 70% of cats have some form of periodontal (gum) disease. As plaque builds up on teeth, bacteria grow and proliferate and can cause inflammation of the gums, abscesses of the tooth root, and can spread to other parts of the body. In addition to causing pain and discomfort in the mouth, periodontal disease has been linked to everything from heart, liver, and kidney disease to osteoporosis and diabetes.

There are several things you can do improve your pet's dental health. As in people, periodic checkups at the veterinarian can be helpful to diagnose any issues, as well as a thorough dental cleaning to remove the plaque and buildup from your pet's teeth. Tooth pastes and rinses are also available for pets. They can be used on a regular basis at home to keep teeth clean. Human products should be avoided as they can cause some severe stomach upset if swallowed. Dental treats such as Greenies can help keep plaque from building up on teeth, as well as special foods designed to improved dental health. Certain hard toys should be avoided as dogs can break off or crack their teeth on these, which can be very painful.

Cats also can have tooth resorption lesions, where the tooth is slowly eaten away and can cause pain and infection. Swelling on the side of the face or trouble eating can be signs that this may be happening. Often a very foul odor coming from the mouth is a sign something is going on and should be checked out by your veterinarian. The mouth can also be the site of various tumors and cancers that can grow quickly. Many of these are not found until they are progressed and difficult to treat.

More information about this subject can be found at [www.petdental.com](http://www.petdental.com). If you have any other questions or concerns about your pet's dental health, don't hesitate to contact your veterinarian.