



**vetco**  
*l i m i t e d*

## **DENTAL DISEASE**

### **What kinds of dental problems do dogs have?**

Dental disease is as common in dogs as it is in people. The most common form of dental disease in man is decay or caries. In the dog the most common problem is periodontal disease. Tartar builds up and causes irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth. The resulting inflammation is gingivitis. The gums ultimately recede exposing the roots which leads to infection and ultimately tooth loss.

### **Isn't it correct that dogs that eat dry dog food don't have tartar build-up?**

Dry food as well as canine chews and other gnawing toys do reduce the amount of tartar accumulating on the teeth, probably due to the mechanical abrasive action. However once tartar has formed, professional cleaning under a general anaesthetic is necessary in order to remove it.

One of the main factors determining the amount of tartar build-up is the individual chemistry in the mouth. Some dogs need yearly cleanings; other dogs need a cleaning only once every few years. Tartar is basically the result of a build up of invisible plaque on the teeth just as with us and dental home care, i.e. getting your dog used to having his teeth brushed regularly, does cut down on plaque formation and hence tartar accumulation. This in turn will result in less general anaesthetics for cleaning and polishing throughout the dog's life. Plaque and tartar accumulation can be minimised by the regular feeding of raw bones and possibly by the use of a variety of products including special foods, toothpastes, sprays and other agents which help to reduce the amount of bacterial plaque in the mouth. It is well worthwhile discussing dental hygiene for your dog with your veterinary surgeon.

### **What does tartar do to the teeth?**

If tartar is allowed to remain on the teeth, several things may happen.

The tartar will mechanically push the gums away from the roots of the teeth. This allows the teeth to loosen in their sockets and infection to enter the root socket. The teeth will loosen and fall out or have to be extracted.

Infection will accumulate in the mouth, resulting in gingivitis, tonsillitis, and pharyngitis (sore throat). Although antibiotics may temporarily suppress the infection, if the tartar is not removed from the teeth, infection will return quickly.

Infection within the mouth will be picked up by the blood stream and carried to other parts of the body. Some kidney and heart disease may be caused by this infection.

## **What is involved in cleaning my dog's teeth?**

Proper cleaning of the teeth requires complete co-operation of the patient so plaque and tartar can be removed properly. For the dog, general anaesthesia is required to thoroughly clean the teeth. Although anaesthesia always carries a degree of risk, the modern drugs in use in practice today minimise this risk, even for older dogs. Depending on your dog's age and general health status, your veterinary surgeon may advise a prior blood test to evaluate liver and kidney function and general health status of the patient.

There are four steps in the cleaning process that will be used on your dog:

**Scaling** removes the tartar above and below the gum line. This is done with hand instruments and ultrasonic cleaning equipment.

**Polishing** smoothes the surface of the teeth, making them resistant to additional plaque formation.

**Flushing** removes dislodged tartar from the teeth and helps to remove the bacteria that accompany tartar.

**Fluoride** coating decreases teeth sensitivity, strengthens enamel, and decreases the rate of future plaque formation.

## **What type of scheduling is needed for teeth cleaning?**

An appointment will be necessary and you will be asked not to feed the dog for approximately eight hours before the procedure. Fluids with the exception of water should also be withheld. Make an appointment with your veterinary surgeon and be sure to attend as requested or to telephone if for any reason the appointment has to be cancelled.

On collection you may be asked to return after a few days to check that all is well, particularly if any extractions have been carried out. Advice regarding dental prophylaxis, brushing, cleaning and use of anti-plaque products etc. may be given.

One useful way of getting your dog accustomed to brushing the teeth is to use an old toothbrush dipped in the dog's dinner since feeding time is, after all, the highpoint of the day for your pet. Unlike us, brushing of the outside of the teeth is all that is really required. A dog's tongue is sufficiently mobile that most of the plaque and in consequence, tartar, is removed from the inside (lingual) surface of the teeth

automatically. Once your pet has become accustomed to this procedure it is a simple step to move to the use of special toothpastes which, unlike ours, are meant to be swallowed and are usually meat or malt flavoured. **DO NOT USE HUMAN DENTIFRICES**, these are foaming products and are not meant to be swallowed and will be universally resented by the dog.