



RAILWAY VETERINARY CLINIC

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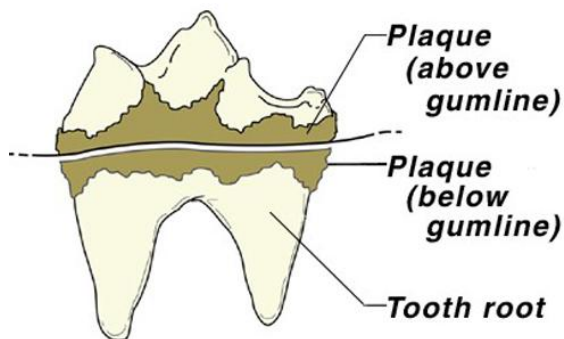
DENTAL DISEASE

How common is dental disease in cats?

Dental disease is one of the most frequent ailments seen by veterinary surgeons, and can be found to some degree in the majority of cats over two years of age. The most common problems are due to periodontal disease, gingivitis and neck lesions (also called resorptive lesions or odontoclastic lesions).

What signs am I likely to see?

There are a number of signs which alert you to the possibility of dental or other mouth problems being present. Your cat may show no interest in approaching the food bowl then be reluctant to eat, or back away. It may chew with obvious caution and discomfort, drop food from the mouth or may swallow with difficulty. Dribbling may be seen, possibly with a marked unpleasant odour to the breath. In some cases the cat may be seen pawing at their mouth or head shaking. A reluctance to eat may lead to weight loss which can become quite marked.



Molar tooth with dental plaque

should
disease
present.
food, or

may

mouth,

blood,

What usually causes dental disease?

The most common cause of dental disease in cats is due to tartar accumulation. As in humans, cats accumulate bacterial plaque on the surface of their teeth, which if not removed quickly becomes mineralised to form tartar (also called calculus). The bacterial products and decaying food stuck to tartar are one potential cause of bad breath.

Tartar is easily identified by its light or dark brown colour - it is normally first seen at the gum edge, especially on the back teeth (premolars & molars). In severe cases it may entirely cover the teeth.

The accumulation of tartar and bacteria on the teeth surfaces will, sooner or later, lead to infection and **gingivitis** (inflammation of the gums). If the disease is caught at this early stage then thorough professional veterinary treatment may permit a full recovery.

However, if gingivitis is allowed to persist untreated, then irreversible **periodontal disease** will occur. During this process the bone and ligaments that support the tooth are destroyed leading to excessive tooth mobility and eventually tooth loss. Infection around the socket causes the formation of pus and a foul odour, and may spread deep into the tooth socket creating an abscess, or even more severe problems.

Once periodontal disease starts, the degenerative changes cannot be reversed. These changes make it easier for more plaque and tartar to collect, so resulting in further disease.

Is gingivitis always associated with dental disease?

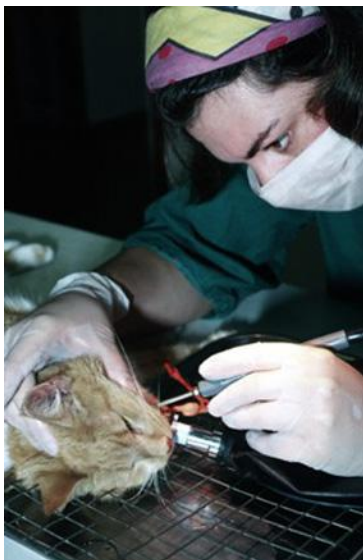
A slight degree of redness seen as a thin line just below the edge of the gum may be considered normal in some kittens and adult cats with no evidence of dental disease. If in doubt then please ask your vet to check your cat's mouth.

Some cats develop severe gingivitis with often dramatic overgrowth of the oral mucosa with minimal signs of accompanying dental disease. The affected areas may extend beyond the gums to other areas of the mouth, such as the throat or tongue. The cause of this disease is not yet known, but it is likely to be multi-factorial which may differ between individual cases. This condition is often very difficult to control and may require repeated or constant treatment including removal of large numbers of teeth, and its accurate diagnosis can involve extensive investigative procedures.

What are tooth neck lesions?

Neck lesions result from a progressive destruction of the tooth substance effectively resulting in slowly deepening "holes" in the teeth concerned. Once the sensitive parts of the tooth is exposed these lesions are intensely painful, and usually the only available treatment is to extract the tooth. The cause of this disease is unknown, however poor oral hygiene is suspected to play a role in the disease-process.

What should I do if my cat has signs of dental problems?



If you can see that your cat has evidence of tartar accumulation, gingivitis or is exhibiting any signs of mouth pain or discomfort then you should take it to your vet for a check-up. You will be advised of the most appropriate course of treatment, which may involve having the cat's teeth examined and cleaned under general anaesthesia.

The rate of tartar accumulation is very variable between individual cats, and in some cases this may necessitate professional cleaning on a regular basis (every 6-12 months). *Do not try to remove tartar from the teeth yourself using any form of metallic instrument. Aside from potentially harming your cat's mouth (or the cat harming you!), you are likely to damage the tooth surface by creating microscopic scratches, which will encourage more rapid plaque formation and cause further disease.*

What can I do to help prevent dental disease in my cat?

In order to help prevent dental disease the prime aim is to keep the mouth as hygienic as possible and to reduce the rate at which tartar builds up on the teeth.

There are some specially designed foods to help try to limit tartar formation. In addition, the act of chewing itself stimulates the production of saliva, which contains natural antibacterial substances; and the mechanical action helps to scrape plaque and tartar off from the teeth.

The most effective way of reducing plaque and tartar is to brush the teeth. A number of toothpastes and brushes are available from your veterinary surgeon for use in animals.

With gentleness, patience and perseverance it is possible to regularly clean some cats teeth in this way. In addition, or as an alternative to brushing if this cannot be achieved, a range of antibacterial mouth-washes and gels (which can also be applied to the fur so that the cat licks it off) can be applied to the teeth & mouth to reduce the amount of bacteria present. Please ask your vet for further details regarding the available products.

Your veterinary surgeon may also routinely check your cats teeth and gums during examinations, including at vaccinations. If they notice tartar build up they may recommend that the teeth are cleaned under anesthesia, before the problem gets too severe.

Never use human toothpaste on cats, as these are not designed to be regularly swallowed and could cause illness.

This client education handout is based on material written by T. J. Gruffydd-Jones, BVetMed, PhD, DipECVIM(CA), MRCVS & Andrea M. Harvey, BVSc, DSAM(Feline), DipECVIM-CA, MRCVS and colleagues. Used with permission under license. ©Lifelearn Ltd, PO Box 16,