

10 Reasons You Need to Book Your Dog a Dentist Appointment, Yesterday

Brushing our teeth is a vital part of our daily routine, twice a day, every day! But when was the last time your dog's dental hygiene was considered? This area of pet healthcare is often an after thought or only noticed when a whiff of that famous doggy bad breath is caught. Read on to see what we can do as owners and vets to help our fanged friends and keep their pearly whites sparkling.

Why Your Dog's Dental Health Deserves More Attention

Did you know that [one in eight dogs suffer from dental disease](#) every year, and periodontal disease is the most common disease in dogs [over three years old](#). That is a lot of dogs! This is why dogs need veterinary dental care along with a dental hygiene routine at home. Dental disease is an umbrella term for dental issues such as plaque and tartar build up on the tooth surface, gingivitis where the gum is inflamed and periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is where there is ligament and bone loss from under the gum surface leading to teeth being lost or tooth root abscesses. Not only are these issues painful if not treated, but they can cause further issues impacting your dog's quality and length of life.

The 10 Reasons

1. **Dental disease can be silent – until it's serious**
 - a. A lot of things can be hidden behind a smile, including dental issues. It can unfortunately go unnoticed for a long time, and only spotted when it has become a serious health concern. Check those teeth often and watch for any signs of pain e.g. only eating on one side of their mouth.
2. **Bad breath might be a red flag, not a quirk**
 - a. Bad dog breath has become almost normal, a running joke, but it is no laughing matter. Bad breath, called halitosis, can be a sign of dental issues and should be checked out. It's a sign bacteria is thriving somewhere, and we need to find it.
3. **Pain isn't always obvious in dogs**
 - a. "My dog is fine, he's still eating ..." A common phrase we vets hear, however it can take a lot to put some dogs off their food or to show pain. This is a survival tactic, and a good one, but we need to make sure our pups are really as

comfortable as they say they are. Watch their behaviour and facial expressions carefully for any changes.

4. Tartar build-up doesn't go away on its own

- a. While plaque, the sticky biofilm of bacteria, can be broken down and improved with dental hygiene measures to some degree, tartar does not go away on its own. This calcified hard calculus buildup needs veterinary dental professional treatment to remove.

5. Infected teeth can affect organs like the heart and kidneys

- a. Infected teeth involve bacteria and that bacteria can enter the rest of the body through the blood stream and has been linked to [systemic diseases](#). The bacteria can be transported throughout the body, and can cause serious issues to other organs like the [heart](#) and kidneys.

6. Gum disease is more common than you think

- a. In [one review](#), while an average prevalence of 9.3-18.2% dogs in a population were found to have dental and gum issues through visual inspection, a whopping 44-100% prevalence was found after detailed examinations of anaesthetised dogs. This means that what we can see from your pups smile is only the tip of the iceberg! Talk to your vet to check if an in-depth dental inspection is needed.

7. Your dog might already be in discomfort without you knowing

- a. Dogs can be very stoic when uncomfortable, all they want to do is please us so they often pretend all is well. This stems from their survival instinct to not look weak to others or higher predators. Sometimes the discomfort is chronic and so it becomes their new normal and they become accustomed to it. But as we all know, toothache can be very painful!

8. Regular cleaning can save you money in the long run

- a. Brushing your dog's teeth can help break down and remove plaque build up, this can delay the development of the hardened tartar. So regular at home dental hygiene can reduce the need for dental procedures in the future, it also provides an excellent opportunity to inspect for any changes!

9. Anaesthetic-free cleanings aren't always enough

- a. Anaesthetic-free cleanings only do part of the job, while the teeth surface may look better you can't see what lurks underneath the gum line. Any scaling or use of dental instruments under the gum line has to be performed at your vets as anaesthesia is needed. It's used not only because this procedure would be uncomfortable to your pet but if performed while conscious the tissues surrounding the teeth can be damaged if your pet moves which would make things much worse.

10. Dental health = better quality of life for longer

- a. Apart from reducing the risk of systemic and future dental issues it is common to see a patient come back in for their check up after a dental procedure with a new lease of life. It is one of the best things to hear owners say their older dog is acting like their younger selves again now their unseen chronic tooth pain has been cured.

What a Dog Dental Appointment Actually Involves

So you've booked a dental procedure at your vets, let's look at what your pet can expect on the day:

Pre-op arrival:

Consent forms for the procedure along with information such as when your pet last ate is filled in on arrival.

Anaesthetic check and induction:

Your pup will have a personalised anaesthetic plan created for their individual needs after a check over by the veterinary team. They will be anaesthetised and made comfortable for the procedure, your pet's comfort is carefully monitored throughout their stay typically with the use of multi-parameter monitors alongside nursing care.

Dental inspection:

Your vet will inspect each tooth individually (yes all 42 of them!) making a chart of what they find, to create a treatment plan. This is when dental x-rays are also performed if necessary.

Scale and polish:

Ultrasonic scaling instruments are then used to clean off the hardened tartar calculus on the tooth surface and under the gum line, and then gone over again with a polishing instrument.

Extractions:

If any tooth is too loose or damaged then extractions can be performed while your pup is comfortably asleep.

Post-op recovery:

Once the procedure is complete, recovery is generally quick and your pup is usually home the same day. They may be drowsy for a day afterwards and have medications like on-going pain relief or antibiotics depending on the issues found through the inspection.

Cost:

The cost of dental procedure varies greatly depending on multiple factors, such as what issues are found during the inspection and length of the procedure. It covers for the anaesthesia, scale and polish, procedures such as extractions and the continual nursing care, along with all the medication and equipment use such as the dental x-ray and sterile instruments. Cost can range

in the UK from £150 to over £500. Unlike with humans where dental procedures and inspections are recommended yearly, dogs who have good at-home dental healthcare may only need to go through dental procedures once or twice in their lifetime.

How to Keep Your Dog's Teeth Healthy Between Appointments

Brushing your dog's teeth should be as routine as brushing your own. Try to build it in gradually and playfully, with lots of encouragement to make it normal and stress free. Use a dog specific enzymatic toothpaste and you can find easy to use brushes to put on your finger if preferred.

Dental chews don't replace brushing, but they do have their place for reducing plaque and aiding your dog's dental health, along with water additives and topical dog dental gels. Another important aspect is diet, as this can have a big impact on dental health in dogs, just the same as with us humans. Talk to your vet about your dog's individual health and dental needs and what's best for them.

Ready to Book That Appointment?

If any of what has been covered here has sounded familiar to you and your pups situation, talk to your vet about next steps, this could be a chat about which dental products you need to stock up on, an in person dental check over or booking in that dental procedure they have been recommending for your pet. Lastly, speak to your vet pronto if any of these potentially serious issues are seen:

- Growths or dark lumps found in the mouth
- Bleeding gums or broken teeth
- Grey or darker coloured individual teeth
- Pale or bright red gums
- Unusual drooling or changes in eating behaviours
- Pawing at their mouth
- Facial swelling or hard lumps by their cheek

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