



Pet Dentistry

Dental disease in dogs and cats

Dental disease is the most common ailment we see in pets, affecting more than 80% of pets aged 3 years and older. Did you know that plaque is actually bacteria? When plaque remains on the teeth, it leads to painful gingivitis (inflamed and bleeding gums). Over time, this plaque hardens to tartar which further irritates the gums and leads to further pain, infection, tooth abscesses, gum loss, bone loss, and eventually tooth loss. This is a gradual but very painful process! If you've ever had a tooth ache, you know what this feels like.

Not only does dental disease cause significant pain, it can also affect your pet's whole body and make them seriously sick. Bacteria that enter through the blood stream from infected or rotten teeth can easily spread to the kidneys, heart, lungs, and other organs.

Overview – Anatomy & Physiology

Key

- a = attached gingiva
- b = gingival margin
- c = oral mucosa
- d = mucogingival junction

Key

- I Incisors
- C Canine
- M Molar
- PM Pre-molar

Healthy teeth and gums

Radiography of a healthy mouth - lower jaw

Radiography of a healthy mouth - upper jaw

How do we assess your pet's teeth?

During a consultation, our vets or nurses will lift your pet's upper lip to have a look at the upper teeth, and fold down their lower lip to check the bottom teeth. We often don't need to actually open the pet's mouth at this time, as we are unlikely to be able to get a good look and most animals do not tolerate this without wriggling. Some pets do allow us to have a really good look, but for the most part, it is not possible to know the full extent of dental disease until the pet is under anaesthesia. When they are asleep, we can have a thorough look, and using diagnostic instruments including radiographs (x-rays) of certain teeth, we can assess the teeth, roots, and the appearance of the bone beneath the gums.

What happens during a dental procedure?

Dentistry can be a complex, time consuming, and specialised procedure, and is certainly not as simple as it may seem.

All dental procedures must occur under a general anaesthetic. It is definitely NOT possible to achieve appropriate results in an awake animal, despite what you may see on the internet. Even a straight forward cleaning relies on a fully asleep animal, and it is not safe to attempt to perform any dentistry procedure if they are awake.



The first step is to systematically assess every tooth, both visually and through the use of instruments. We recommend radiographs of the whole mouth in order to gain a complete picture of the health of each tooth, tooth roots, and the surrounding jaw bone. Often, teeth that look clean and healthy on the surface are shown on radiographs to be diseased and needing some form of

treatment. The health and eventual treatment of each tooth is documented on your pet's individual dental chart. If a tooth is determined to be diseased, the usual treatment is extraction. The front teeth (incisors) are small, with single roots, and are generally fairly easy to remove with instruments in what is termed a 'simple extraction'.

Premolars and molars have up to three roots, and usually require a surgical, or 'major extraction'. Using local anaesthesia, this involves making a cut in the gum around the tooth and peeling the gum away from the underlying bone to create a flap. The bone holding the tooth in place is then removed with a high powered dental drill to expose the roots. Using a combination of hand held instruments as well as the drill, the tooth is then gradually eased out sideways. There is often some bleeding, which is controlled with absorbent materials and medications. The socket

that is left behind usually has quite jagged and rough edges, and these are smoothed down with a special drill attachment made from metal and diamond. The gum flap is then stitched back to the rest of the gum to cover the hole made in the jaw. Though canine teeth have only a single root, it is very long and very strong, so most diseased canines also require surgical extraction.

Once any extractions have been performed, radiographs are taken again to ensure that no root fragments are left behind in the socket. To remove plaque and tartar, the remaining teeth are then scaled using a special dental solution and an ultrasonic scaler. Scaling must be performed under the gum line as well as all over the exposed tooth surface. We then polish all surfaces of the tooth to reduce plaque build-up in the future.



Dental x-rays taken at The Vet Clinic, showing a dog's lower premolar before and after extraction

What are the costs involved?

Estimating costs for dental procedures is actually really difficult due to the complexity of the procedure and the need for a general anaesthetic to fully assess the pet's complete dental health.

If your pet does not require any extractions, we do try to keep the costs affordable so that pets can receive preventative assessments and cleanings more frequently. These so called 'scale and polish' procedures generally cost between \$275 and \$680.

A 'major' dental procedure with comprehensive radiographs, multiple extractions, a long anaesthesia, and medications to take home, may take 3-4 hours and can cost upwards of \$1800, which is why we recommend more frequent preventative procedures to hopefully avoid having to have a major dental!

Is there any special after care?

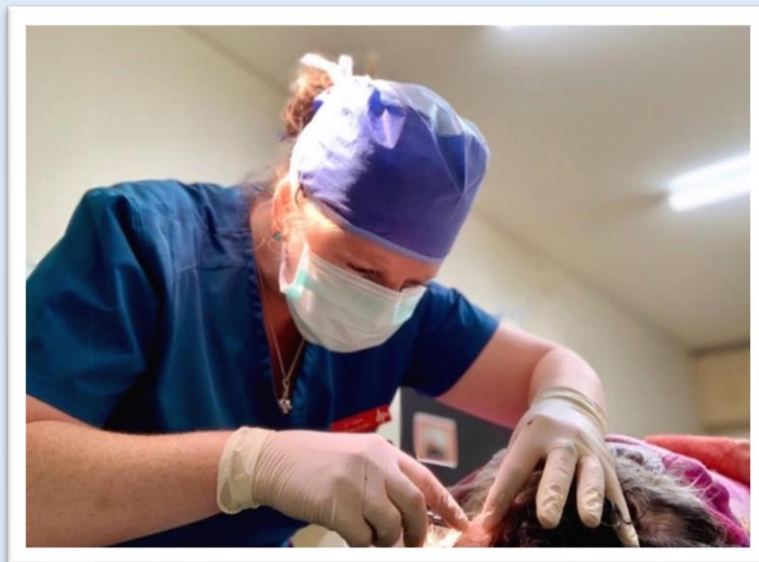
For a simple scale and polish, the after care is similar to that for any anaesthetic: keep your pet inside, warm and quiet the night of the procedure, offer a small meal in the evening, and allow your pet to gradually recover from the anaesthesia.

For a major dental, home care will depend on how many teeth have been extracted and what else may have been found during the procedure. It is normal to expect some facial swelling and some mild bleeding from the mouth. There may be medications to give at home, and possibly further instructions for your pet. Our surgical nurses will talk you through the procedure and after care at your discharge appointment.

How do I book this procedure?

To ensure you have some idea of what to expect from the dental procedure, it is recommended that your pet's teeth are first assessed by one of our team. Our vets routinely examine your pet's mouth during every vaccination visit, and often at other visits as well, and will advise if a dental procedure is recommended.

It is also possible to book a free dental check appointment with one of our lovely and experienced nurses.



If you have been advised that your pet requires a dental procedure, we perform these on any weekday. Your pet will need to be admitted at the clinic in the morning, and they will stay with us for the rest of the day. We do our very best to provide you with a prior estimate that is as accurate as possible, but unfortunately due the nature of dentistry, it can be challenging to predict just what is required until we have assessed the pet's mouth under anaesthesia. We are more than happy to contact you whilst your pet is asleep to explain the extent of treatment required and give you a closer estimate of costs before we proceed with treatment.