

Dental Disease

Pets are like people in many ways, including their need for regular dental care. If a pet's oral health is neglected, it can result in far more than just unpleasant odors. It can eventually lead to gum and tooth disease. In fact, over 68% of all dogs and cats have some form of gum and tooth disease by just 3 years of age. Few pets show signs of dental disease. It is up to you and your veterinarian to uncover this hidden and often painful condition. Left untreated, this disease can cause tooth loss, infections, and abscesses, and can eventually affect the internal organs, putting a pet's life at risk.

What is periodontal disease? *Periodontal disease* is a term used to describe inflammation or infection of the tissues surrounding the tooth. Accumulation of tartar and calculus on the teeth causes gum recession around the base of the tooth. Infection soon follows and the gums recede further, exposing sensitive unprotected tooth root surfaces and the bony tooth sockets. The bone then becomes softened due to the infection. This irreversible bone loss leads to painful, sometimes mobile, teeth that need to be extracted. As the oral infection progresses, tonsillitis and pharyngitis can occur. The bacteria can also be absorbed into the blood stream and be carried to other organs. "Bad teeth" can cause infections in the heart valves (*endocarditis*), lungs, kidneys, and/or liver.

My pet received a grade of dental disease. What does this mean? At our clinic, we grade dental disease on a scale of 1-4. Below are the explanations for each grade.

Grade1

When your pet receives a grade of 1, it means that there is a minor accumulation of tartar that is not yet causing gingivitis or other signs of periodontal disease. This is the PERFECT time to have a professional dental cleaning performed as it will aide in PREVENTING disease rather than TREATING it. Most of us go to the dentist regularly to have our own teeth cleaned to avoid painful dental problems; a Grade 1 dental cleaning is much like these routine visits to your dentist. A Grade 1 dental cleaning is routine, non-traumatic, and much less expensive than Grade 2-4 cleanings. People are often amazed by how white and healthy their pets' teeth look after having a Grade 1 cleaning done.

Grade2

If your pet receives a grade of 2, it means that there is a mild to moderate accumulation of tartar with visible signs of mild to moderate gingivitis. You may notice redness along the gum-line above the teeth and halitosis or bad breath. At this grade, full mouth x-rays need to be done to detect infection and bone loss around the parts of the teeth which we cannot see beneath the gum line. Though many Grade 2 cleanings are routine and uneventful, it is possible for extractions to be necessary when there is existing periodontal disease.

Grade3

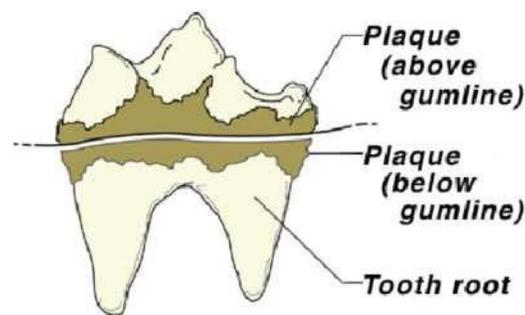
A grade of 3 means that your pet has accumulated a moderate to severe amount of tartar with visible signs of moderate to severe gingivitis along with obvious gum recession. At this grade, full mouth x-rays need to be done to detect infection and bone loss around the parts of the teeth which we cannot see beneath the gum line. A cleaning at this point will most likely include extractions as bone loss around tooth roots is common.

Grade4

This is the highest level of periodontal disease. Severe tartar accumulation, gingivitis, and recession is observed. Teeth may be very mobile, almost to the point of falling out. Pus and other signs of severe infection may be visible along the gum line. This grade of dental disease is extremely painful and should be dealt with right away. If disease is left untreated at this point, tooth loss and/or tooth root abscesses are

inevitable and widespread infection is very common, even to major organs like the heart, kidneys, and/or liver. Grade 4 cleanings almost always include extractions of several teeth as most teeth in the mouth are diseased and painful. Therefore, cleanings at this level of disease are often very expensive.

Why does a dental cleaning need to be performed under general anesthesia? Cleanings without anesthesia are never recommended as legal standard of care. Without anesthesia, an oral examination is limited as there is no way to fully examine the entirety of the mouth, throat, and tongue. Tartar hides beneath the gum line and will continue to cause periodontal problems even if the tartar on the exposed surface of the tooth is removed. Under anesthesia, scaling underneath the gum line is possible, as well as on the inside surfaces of the tooth, leaving a truly clean and virtually disease-free mouth. The anesthetics we use are extremely safe and we take great measures to ensure our patients' safety under anesthesia, including a state-of-the-art monitoring system as well as dedicated technicians who are there with our dental patients from induction to recovery. For more information on why general anesthesia is necessary during a dental cleaning, please visit avdc.org/dentalscaling.



Molar tooth with dental plaque

What can I expect from a dental cleaning for my pet? Your pet will be admitted to the hospital in the morning on the day of the scheduled procedure. An IV catheter is placed to deliver anesthetic and nausea medications and to administer fluids during the procedure. In Grade 2 and above canine dentals and in all cat dentals*, full-mouth digital dental X-rays are performed to better evaluate tooth health above and below the gum line. If any badly infected, painful, or loose teeth are found either during the oral examination or upon viewing the X-rays, the veterinarian can extract them surgically. In this case, comprehensive pain control will be administered.

**All cat dentals receive full-mouth x-rays because of the common occurrence of resorptive lesions (cavities) in this species.*

A licensed veterinary technician will then begin cleaning the teeth using an ultrasonic scaler. This removes plaque and tartar on the exposed surfaces of the teeth as well as underneath the gum-line. After the cleaning is completed, the teeth are polished and antimicrobial rinse is applied to the entire mouth.

You will be notified upon completion of your pet's dental procedure and will be able to pick them up later in the afternoon once they have fully recovered from anesthesia. Upon dismissal, we will provide you with tips on how to best care for your pet's teeth from home, including the best brushing techniques, treats, and chew toys. We'll also give you before-and-after photos of your pet's mouth.

How often do I need to have my pet's teeth cleaned? Pets accumulate bacteria and tartar at different rates. To decrease the frequency of necessary cleanings and help maintain good oral health, routine home dental care is recommended. This can include regular tooth-brushing (with pet toothpaste only as human toothpaste contains ingredients that are harmful to pets) or the daily use of Oravet and CET chews. Dental

treats, special dental foods, rinses, and water additives, though not as effective, are other useful tools for pets that are not tolerant of brushing. We are happy to provide tips on home dental care if desired.

Why is there such a range of prices on the estimate for my pet's dental cleaning? For dental disease that is graded at a 2 or above, it is hard to provide an entirely accurate estimate because the true extent of the disease cannot be fully evaluated until the procedure has begun. Full-mouth x-rays may reveal diseased teeth that looked relatively normal during the wellness exam, and failing to do dental x-rays is like flying to the moon without a navigation system, exciting but perilous at best. Large amounts of tartar can obscure an underlying diseased tooth; this would only become apparent after removal of the tartar. Therefore, our estimates for any dental cleanings above a Grade 1 include a range to factor in possible extraction (periodontal surgery) time and associated costs (pain medications, additional anesthesia time, etc.).

Why are pet dental cleanings so expensive, and why is it dangerous to cut corners? Unlike most routine human dental visits, pets must be anesthetized to perform their dental cleanings. With anesthesia comes associated costs, including pre-medications to allow for a smoother anesthetic recovery, pre-anesthetic bloodwork when required, and surgical monitoring time and labor. We also take many measures to ensure our patients' safety and comfort before, during, and after the procedure. These include intravenous catheterization for the administration of fluids to maintain blood pressure, an IV fluid warming system and heated blankets to maintain body temperature, and an anesthetic protocol geared specifically to each patient. In addition, extractions have associated costs including doctors' time, surgical and dental instruments, sutures, pain medications, and additional gas anesthesia time.

The potentially high cost of dental cleanings is just one of several reasons why we recommend having dental cleanings performed at a Grade 1 status when possible. Grade 1 cleanings are typically much less expensive since they are most often routine and uneventful without the need for extractions.

We understand that the cost of dental cleanings can sometimes be a deterrent. Therefore, we offer dental discounts of 10% off during our Dental Discount Months (February and September). We also extend this discount to all patients who receive a dental cleaning within 30 days of their annual wellness exam. In addition, we offer Care Credit, which is a medical line of credit that can be applied to the cost of a dental cleaning at 0% interest for six months.

We look forward to seeing you for a dental cleaning soon! It's a vital aspect of your pet's health!