DAVIS DRIVE
ANIMAL CLINIC

Your Pet Is Family

Dental Disease

Oral disease is one of the most common, yet serious health problems in veterinary medicine – affecting 80% dogs and 70% of cats by age three.

If neglected, oral disease can cause significant pathology and pain and will have a profound affect on your pet's quality of life.

Studies have shown that our pets feel dental pain in the same way and to the same degree as we do but they are very good at hiding this pain. Evolution has taught our pets to hide their pain. In the wild, an animal seen as being weak or distressed stands little chance of survival. They often continue to eat despite the pain and will often act normally.

Signs of Dental Disease:

- **difficulty chewing, food dropping from the mouth, excessive salivation**
- **discoloured teeth; inflamed, swollen, recessed or bleeding gums**
- **halitosis – the offensive odour that accompanies periodontal disease, results from the bacteria associated with plaque, calculus, diseased gum tissues and decomposing food particles retained in periodontal pockets**
- **reluctance to have mouth handled**
- **loss of energy, depression**

Pets do not always tell you when they are feeling poorly, but they will let you know when they are feeling better. Very often, when a "bad mouth" is rehabilitated the pet will seem brighter and more energetic or playful and will eat better.

ORAL ASSESSMENT, TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

The gold standard in oral healthcare

Assessment

Patient history:

- Is the animal showing abnormal signs ?
- Does the patient's breath smell
- What is being done now for the pet's oral health ?
- Would the pet owner be willing to brush the teeth ?
- Would the pet's temperament allow for tooth brushing ?
- What does the patient eat ?
- What kind of chew toys does the patient have ?
- Does the patient currently get dental treats ? If so how often ?
- When was the last time the pet had a professional teeth cleaning ? What if any dental care has the pet received in the past ?

General Physical Exam

A general physical health examination is performed on the entire animal to identify any other health problems that may need to be addressed. For example, the chest is auscultated for any heart murmurs, arrhythmias, or abnormal lung sounds and the abdomen is palpated for any unusual masses or areas of discomfort. Every body system is examined in detail in order to obtain an overall total health assessment of the patient.

The Oral Exam:

The extent of an oral examination of a cat or dog that is awake depends on patient cooperation. Most pets will allow a brief look at their teeth and oral cavity if approached slowly and gently. Unfortunately some patients with oral disease may be in too much pain for examination without sedation or general anesthesia.

Even with total cooperation from the pet, the true extent of their oral health cannot be determined while awake as the majority of dental disease is located below the gumline hidden from view. Even pets with normal looking pink gums can have an abscessed tooth.

The degree of plaque and tartar accumulation, the presence of gingival recession, redness or swelling, pus along the gumline, mobile teeth and the enlargement of lymph nodes or tonsils will be graded on the oral exam. Missing, fractured, poorly positioned teeth and any oral masses will be noted. Periodontal health is determined under anesthesia by probing under the gums and by reviewing digital dental radiographs.

Preoperative Laboratory Tests:

All pets require a pre-anesthetic blood test prior to any dental treatment to evaluate organ function and to determine their candidacy for a general anesthetic. Generally older patients and patients with pre existing diseases (kidney, liver, diabetes) will require more tests before anesthesia and surgery. Some pets will need to have a cardiac work up (ultrasound/ECG) if they have a heart murmur or arrhythmia.

Anesthesia:

General anesthesia is required to diagnose and treat dental disease in companion animals. Anesthesia is a concern for everyone. The only way we can achieve the best possible outcome is to select the proper patient, tailor the anesthetic protocol to the individual and monitor the pet carefully during and after the procedure.

All pets undergoing anesthesia will receive intravenous fluids, a warmed air blanket and will be connected to blood pressure, heart and breathing monitors. A registered veterinary technician is by the pet's side the entire time to monitor the vital signs and to report any issues to the veterinarian.

Periodontal Examination:

The foundation of oral assessment is a visual tooth by tooth examination under anesthesia. Results of this exam will help determine the extent of the dental disease.

A periodontal probe is used to measure the depth of the gingival pocket in millimeters and help evaluate the extent of the periodontal support.
The dental explorer has a sharp point used to examine the root surface for calculus and demineralization.

Intraoral radiography offers the capability to view pathology below the gumline, as well as inside and around the tooth. A full mouth series of digital images are taken and viewed on computer. The dental films come in a variety of sizes to accommodate all types of pets.

Treatment

Before starting, the mouth is rinsed with an antiseptic solution. Using an ultrasonic scaler that vibrates at 30,000 cycles per second, plaque and tartar deposits are removed from the surface of the tooth. The handpiece provides for constant irrigation to keep the tooth cooled. For work below the gumline a different attachment is used that is gentle on the soft tissue. In some cases it is necessary to make an incision and open up the gums to order to access deeper areas.

Once the tooth is cleaned, a polishing handpiece is used to smooth the surface of the enamel using fine grit pumice.

For any tooth that requires extraction, local anesthetic nerve blocks are placed in the mouth to freeze the area. This provides up to 6-8 hrs of pain relief that allows less anesthetic to be used during the procedure as well as ongoing pain control post op. Additional analgesia is provided to the pet prior to the local anesthetic wearing off.

Extracting a tooth is difficult in companion animals due to the length and location of the tooth roots. Additionally, some teeth have up to 3 roots each. Removing a tooth usually requires making incisions into the gums and creating a flap, removing some bone from around the roots and sectioning the tooth into individual crown-root segments. After extraction, the socket is debrided, flushed and any rough edges of bone are smoothed. The socket is then closed using dissolvable sutures. This prevents dry socket or food impactions and contributes to faster healing.

A follow up exam in 2 weeks allows for an inspection of the mouth to monitor healing and to review preventative homecare options.

Prevention

Daily tooth brushing is the best way to slow the accumulation of plaque and the onset of periodontal disease. Most pets take to this easily especially when started young and the benefits to the animal and to the owner's pocket book is enormous.

Prescription dental diets and chew aids are also available to help with dental disease prevention.

The team at the Davis Drive Animal Clinic would be happy to work with you to ensure the continued good health of your pet's mouth. For more information please visit us at www.davisdrivevet.com.