

Pet Dental Care Fact Sheet

Dogs

*Puppies develop 28 temporary teeth at about two to three weeks of age. Their 42 permanent teeth emerge at about four months of age.

*Studies show that by the age of three, 80% of dogs exhibit signs of gum disease.

*Small dog breeds such as Toy Poodles and Shih-Tzus, are more likely than large dog breeds such as Golden Retrievers, German Shepherds, and Irish Setters, to develop periodontal disease. Canine dentistry experts believe this is true because the teeth of small dogs are often too large for their mouths, forcing the teeth closer together.

Cats

*Kittens receive 26 temporary teeth at about two weeks of age. They develop 30 permanent teeth at about three to four months.

*Studies show that by age three, about 70 % of cats show signs of gum disease.

*Cervical line lesions are the most common dental disease of domestic cats. The disease, which is also referred to as neck lesions, was virtually unrecognized until the mid 1970's. Recent studies show that about 28% of domestic cats show at least one lesion. The lesions often begin below the gum line, so they can develop undetected. Often, the first signs include bad breath and tooth sensitivity. Pet owners should seek veterinary care if their cats exhibit any of these symptoms.

Action Steps for Dogs and Cats

• Both puppies and kittens should have a dental examination by a veterinarian at two, three, and four months of age, followed by annual examinations. Early dental exams allow veterinarians to identify dental development problems early when the pet can benefit from early intervention.

• All dogs and cats can benefit from regular home dental care routine that is recommended by a veterinarian. This home care program often will include both regular brushing and proper nutritional food.

• Introduce a brushing program to pets gradually. At first, dip a finger into beef bouillon for dogs or tuna water for cats. Rub the soaked finger gently over pet's mouth and teeth. Make the initial sessions short and positive. Gradually, introduce a piece of gauze over the finger and gently scrub the teeth in a circular motion. Finally, you can introduce a soft toothbrush designed for pets.

• Make sure to use a brush designed for pets. Special pet toothbrushes are available from your veterinarian or specialty pet stores.

• Don't use toothpaste for people because it could upset the animal's stomach. Specially flavored toothpastes designed for pets are available from your veterinarian or specialty stores.

• Feed a nutritionally balanced diet. There is now a specially formulated dietary food with dental benefits that you can feed to your pet once they switch to a maintenance food. This food is available through veterinarians and can actually reduce the accumulation of plaque and tartar while they are eating.

• Avoid feeding table scraps to dogs or cats.

