

The Best Dental Care for Your Best Friend

Here at Animal Wellness Center, we believe that routine dental care for your dog or cat is just as important as any other routine healthcare procedure. Keeping up with your pet's dental routine is not only a great way to ensure healthy teeth and fresher breath, but also serves as a preventative measure toward many other, often life threatening, health issues later in your pet's life.

Periodontal disease not only affects the mouth, but can also lead to more serious health problems such as heart, lung, and kidney disease. Good dental hygiene is just as important for pets as it is for humans, yet it is one of the most overlooked areas in pet health. Just like in humans, periodontal disease starts out as a bacterial film called plaque. Plaque is a fairly soft substance that regular brushing and specialized dental treats can help remove, but eventually this plaque calcifies and hardens into tartar, allowing more plaque to accumulate on the teeth and around the gums. If left to spread, this plaque will irritate the gum line and lead to gingivitis, which can be very painful for your furry friend! This buildup can also eventually spread beneath the gum line and cause infection around the tooth root. In the final stages of periodontal disease, the tissues surrounding the tooth are destroyed, the bony socket holding the tooth in erodes, and the tooth becomes loose. This is a very painful process for your four-legged friend.

In addition to mouth pain, unchecked periodontal disease also poses a very real threat to the internal health of your pet. Not only can an infection of the tooth root invade the bones of the jaw, but bacteria from the mouth can also enter the bloodstream and be carried around the body. Veterinary studies have shown that periodontal disease is associated with microscopic changes in the heart, liver, and kidneys in the sense that damage to these organs in your pet may be directly related to poor dental health!

So how can you avoid these issues? Prevention is key, of course, and regular dental examinations by your veterinarian beginning when your pet is young is ideal. However, there is help available for any pet regardless of age or level of dental health. At Animal Wellness Center, we offer a broad range of dental care procedures including, but not limited to, full dental examinations with a consultation, dental prophylaxis (teeth cleaning), and a wide variety of at-home dental care products.

The Exam

We inspect the dental health of each pet as part of his/her regular physical examination. Upon examination, your pet will be given a "dental health grade". Just like in school, an "A" is top notch, meaning that your pet's dental health is ideal and preventative measures may be taken or continued to keep dental disease at bay. A grade of "F", however, requires immediate attention as this implies that your pet's dental health has reached a severe level of dental disease and that his/her overall health may be in danger. Depending upon your pet's dental health grade, Dr. Anderson may recommend that he/she receive a dental prophylaxis, or teeth cleaning, immediately or sometime in the future. Keep in mind that even if your pet is in excellent dental health, yearly cleanings are ideal as a preventative measure against future dental disease.

Dental Prophylaxis

We would like to consider our dental regimen at Animal Wellness Center unique in this region in that we do not simply "scrape and brush" a pet's teeth. We strive each day to reach the same standard of medical care for pets as is required for humans, and our approach to dental health and wellness upholds this standard. We follow a strict agenda of criteria when preparing for and performing our dentals, all of which meet guidelines set forth by the American Veterinary Dental College and the American Animal Hospital Association. Because our clinic reflects such a high standard of care and we understand that you expect nothing less for your best friend, we require that each pet be screened and monitored extensively before, during, and after his/her dental in order to maximize the effectiveness and safety of the dental procedure itself. We also require that each pet be placed under general anesthesia for the length of the procedure, allowing us to employ several different methods of cleaning in order to ensure the healthiest mouth possible. Some of the services you can expect your pet to receive when scheduled for a dental prophylaxis include (but are not limited to):

- Pre-operative bloodwork - This imperative step allows us to take a deeper look into your pet's health in order to ensure his/her organ systems are functioning properly. Even if your pet seems bright and healthy, it is important to screen for any medical conditions that may make anesthesia dangerous for your pet. This is even more true for those pets with more severe dental disease due to, as previously mentioned, the correlation between oral health and several types of organ diseases.
- IV catheterization - Just like in human medicine, any time we place a pet under anesthesia, we want to make sure the pet remains hydrated throughout the procedure, that his/her blood flows well, and that complications in general are kept at a minimum.
- Anesthesia monitoring - When your pet is under anesthesia, his/her vital signs (such as body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration) are constantly monitored and recorded. This helps ensure your pet's safety while under anesthesia.
- Skull Radiographs - Radiographs (or x-rays) are one of the MOST IMPORTANT diagnostic tools available to a veterinary clinic. When utilized to record images of the skull and mouth before a dental procedure, they allow the internal anatomy of the teeth, the roots, and the bone that surrounds the roots to be examined. Skull radiographs also help us detect abnormalities that cannot be seen through physical examination alone and can confirm the need for tooth extraction or referral for root canal therapy when teeth are loose or badly infected. The importance of radiographs when considering your pet's dental health cannot be stressed enough; A large portion of dental disease exists beneath the gum line and around the tooth root where it cannot be seen, and our ability to perform skull radiographs in order to catch unseen problems allows us to truly provide the best medicine for your pet.
- Dental Scaling and Polishing - At Animal Wellness Center, as we extend our goal for human-grade medical care into the field of dentistry, you can expect your pet to receive top-notch oral care. Not only will your pet's teeth be scaled and cleaned to remove visible tartar and plaque, but the portion of his/her teeth BENEATH the gum line (where much disease-causing bacteria like to hide) will be scaled and cleaned as well. In addition to tartar and plaque removal, your pet will also receive full-scale dental polishing, a fluoride treatment, and an application of plaque-prevention gel. When your pet wakes from anesthesia, he/she will have a bright and healthy new smile to show the world!

Aftercare and Beyond

Following your pet's dental prophylaxis, he/she will be gently woken from anesthesia and placed into one of our quiet hospital kennels for recovery. A member of our staff will call you, the pet parent, as soon as your pet is awake from anesthesia to set a pick-up and consultation time later in the day. Upon pick-up, one of Dr. Anderson's assistants will thoroughly explain your pet's visit, including pre-operative care, intra-operative anesthesia monitoring, and post-operative monitoring. Finally, the assistant will discuss with you your pet's aftercare plan, personally tailored to your pet's needs in order to provide the best quality of long-term dental health possible.