

Periodontal Disease

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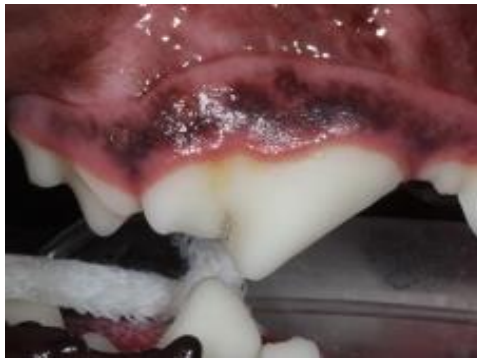


Figure 1. Healthy gingiva with slight amount of dental tartar present

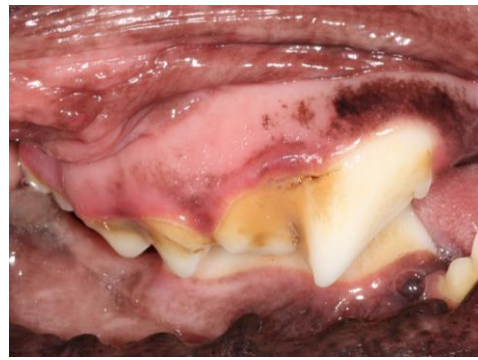


Figure 2. Moderate dental tartar with redness and swelling of the gingiva near the tooth indicating periodontal inflammation requiring professional cleaning, evaluation with dental X-rays radiographs

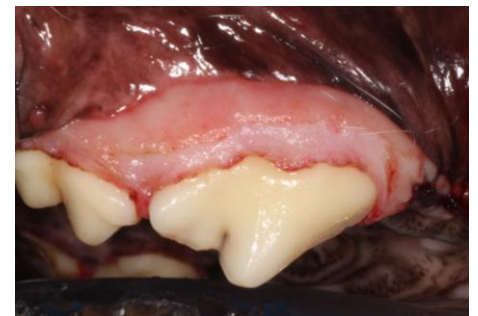
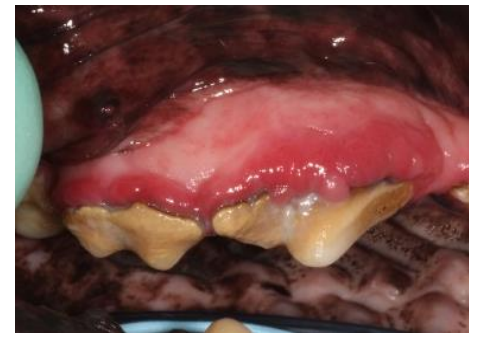


Figure 3. Top photo shows heavy tartar with severe gingivitis. Middle photo is same tooth with inflamed gingiva retracted to demonstrate tartar underneath, hidden from view. Bottom photo is same tooth after professional cleaning and removal of excess gingiva to allow effective homecare.

Periodontal disease is the most common disease affecting dogs and cats. Ninety percent of dogs and cats have periodontal disease by 4 years of age, which is likely underestimated. Periodontal disease is largely preventable, but most people are not aware of its presence. The disease is pretty straight forward so let's keep it simple. Plaque (the fuzzy stuff on your teeth in the morning when you wake up) is a film that forms on the teeth and contains bacteria. Some bacteria release toxins, which can destroy tissues, but also stimulate white blood cells to release enzymes to kill them. The enzymes are not specific, therefore damaging the bacteria as well as the teeth and surrounding tissues. The bacteria numbers increase as they make their way into the deeper tissues causing more and more bone loss. Bacteria can be absorbed into the bloodstream, possibly causing damage to the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys. There is a bit of a war going on and the pet needs an advocate to fight back. Without treatment, the process continues, leading to tooth loss, a broken jaw or even organ damage which can shorten their life or make them feel bad. Animals with periodontal disease generally have bad breath as the main sign, but can also have bleeding gums, receding gums, loose teeth, heavy calculus accumulation, decreased energy, increased time sleeping and sometimes grumpiness. One of the biggest roadblocks to treatment is their natural instinct to eat for survival. Most of the time, they are still eating, chewing their favorite toys and even excited when you get home. People will try to explain away signs of disease, such as bad breath. Bad breath is not normal! The pet owner saw them pet eating poop or licking their rear and blamed the odor on that. I would challenge them to smell each end of their pet and see if they smell the same. Trust me; they don't, proving that theory is false!

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The smell in the mouth is from the bacterial toxins and the tissue that is rotting under those cute furry lips. After appropriate diagnosis, treatment and prevention, I consistently hear clients tell me their pet feels better than it has in years. They thought their dog or cat was just getting old and slowing down. Once we removed the source of pain and infection they appeared to be a younger version of themselves. Many clients end up feeling guilty at the recheck when they realize their beloved companion had problems they were not aware of. Guilt is the last thing I want for my clients. I want to remove the source of pain and infection and find a long lasting solution to a disease process that affects essentially every animal on the planet. Right now, there are many animals with severe disease that requires removal of all of their teeth and they end up being much better off than before. This is a drastic measure, but hopefully, over time, more veterinarians and pet owners will become aware of the benefits of diagnosis, treatment and prevention of periodontal disease. I am proud to say, I have finally joined the 2% of the pet owning population that brushes their pet's teeth. I get out the toothbrush and oral rinse each day and brush my dog's teeth. No more bleeding gums for her and no more stinky dragon breath in my face! Brushing only takes a minute and makes her life, and mine, much more pleasant.

Pets with any degree of red gums, bad breath or plaque and tartar accumulation need a professional teeth cleaning with a detailed tooth-by-tooth exam and full-mouth dental radiographs under general anesthesia. Once the mouth is fully evaluated, we will make recommendations for appropriate treatment as well as preventative measures to control further disease.

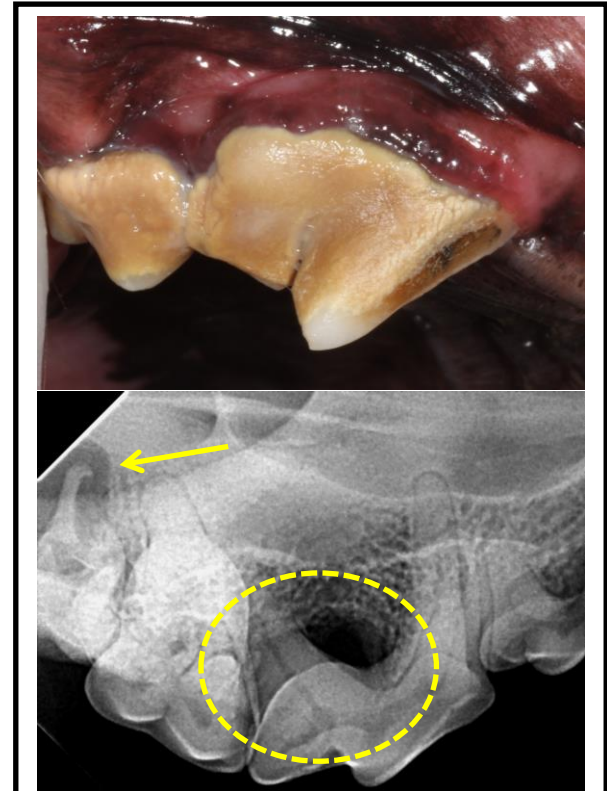


Figure 4. Top photo shows heavy tartar with moderate gingivitis and gingival recession. Bottom is an X-ray of the same area showing major bone loss (outlined) of the 4th premolar and a surprise finding of root resorption with suspected abscess of the 2nd molar (arrow) demonstrating the value of dental x-rays.



Figure 5. Top photo shows moderate tartar and minimal inflammation but the x-ray below shows severe bone loss that was worse than expected on the surface.

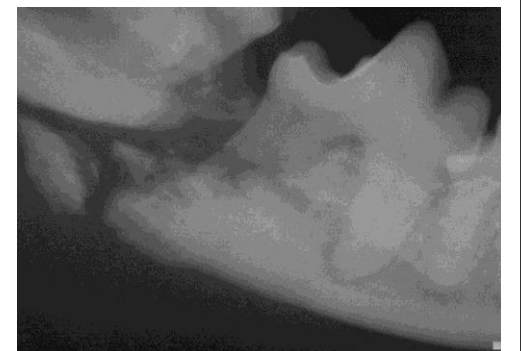


Figure 6. X-ray of broken lower jaw of pet whose owner declined treatment because she was still eating