

# AMC

SINCE 1910

## ANIMAL MEDICAL CENTER

### **The importance of dental care for dogs and cats.**

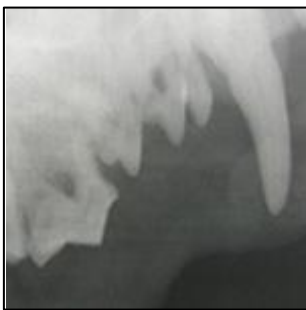
#### ***Part 1 of a 3 -part series by Stephen Riback, DVM***

Like people, our pets are prone to dental disease. This month focuses on the importance of controlling and preventing dental disease in our cats and dogs. Untreated dental disease is associated with both infection and pain. Recent studies in people and dogs show that untreated infection in the mouth has also been linked to infections in other parts of their bodies.

#### **Periodontal Disease**

The most common disease in dogs is periodontal disease. It affects 85% of dogs over 5 years old and occurs in cats as well. Plaque and tartar accumulating on the tooth surface are full of bacteria that may cause a loss of attachment of the tooth to the supporting bone, gum tissue and periodontal ligaments. This attachment loss creates an increased space between the teeth and the gums that can harbor more harmful bacteria. This space is called a periodontal pocket. It is the harmful bacteria or infection living in this space that causes the halitosis or bad breath that we associate with periodontal disease.

Untreated periodontal disease causes progressive attachment loss and ultimately leads to chronic infections under the gum line. Dogs with untreated periodontal disease are prone to having their teeth fall out, they are prone to spontaneous jaw fractures, and they are more prone to diseases of other organs including the heart, lungs, kidneys and liver. The underlying periodontal disease can also be painful, but we tend not to notice our pet's pain because it creeps up slowly over several years. As pet owners we tend to assume our pet is slowing down is just part of the normal aging process. Many times, it's the oral discomfort from dental disease causing the changes. If your pet has halitosis, or bad breath, periodontal disease should be considered. Red gums, bleeding gums, root exposure, gum recession and loose teeth may also be signs of advanced periodontal disease.



Diagnosis and treatment of periodontal disease requires general anesthesia. All patients should be prescreened to determine their ability to safely handle anesthesia. This includes a thorough examination, blood tests and sometimes other tests. Diagnosis is made by probing the periodontal tissues surrounding each tooth to look for evidence of

bone loss and gum loss. Intra oral radiographs or X-Rays are also taken to evaluate the amount of bone loss present. Treatment for periodontal disease in our pets depends upon how advanced the disease is. Treatments include dental prophies (routine cleanings) for mild cases, medical or surgical therapies for moderate cases and extraction therapy for advanced cases. Stage 2 periodontal disease usually requires advanced periodontal surgery or extractions. Stage 3 periodontal disease usually requires advanced periodontal surgery or extractions. Stage 4 periodontal disease always requires extraction, even if the teeth look fairly normal from the outside. Many pet owners report that their pet seems happier or younger after successful treatment of Periodontal disease is often preventable through proper oral hygiene. This involves

thorough home health care, including brushing the teeth daily. Dental diets are also available for keeping the teeth cleaner. Dental sealants may be used to prevent plaque and tartar accumulation. Also, regular cleanings under general anesthesia are recommended to keep the teeth clean above and below the gum line. \*



If you notice halitosis, red gums, bleeding gums, loose teeth, discolored teeth or oral discomfort in your pet, you should be considering an oral evaluation for periodontal disease or other dental problems seen in dogs and cats. Our pets give us so much love. The least that we can do for our pets is help to maintain them with healthy, pain free, infection free mouths.

#### AMC Dentists:



Dr. Dan Carmichael



Dr. Stephen Riback



Dr. Django Martel

\*The Veterinary Oral Health Council has a list of dentrificies that have been approved to decrease plaque and tartar. Please visit their website at [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org) for this list of products.