

K.C. CAT CLINIC
7107 Main Street
Kansas City, MO 64114
Phone (816) 361-4888
kccatclinic.com

FELINE DENTAL DISEASE

Cats, just like people, will develop plaque and tartar on their teeth. The presence of this stuff usually results in some degree of inflammation and disease of the tooth and gum unless it is cleaned off. Some cats are more prone to developing dental disease than others. A lot is driven by genes. You probably know some people who brush and floss and still have to go to the periodontist every 3 months. It really doesn't matter whether your cat eats canned or dry food, it still happens. Any time you see that red line of inflammation above a tooth, it means infection. No matter how small and insignificant it seems, it means that the body has ramped up an immune response that causes consequences. Gingivitis in cats frequently results in certain cells called osteoclasts getting called to action to start munching away at the root of the affected tooth. It results in severe disease under the gum line that you can't see without x-rays. Gingivitis also often progresses to periodontal disease. Cats will get deep pockets in the gums and bone loss that compromises how well the teeth are attached just like in people. If the disease is bad enough, the tooth must be extracted. It's oral surgery and must be done carefully to minimize issues recurring.

Until recently, dental disease in animals was largely overlooked. Recommendations for dental procedures were confined to those cases that were already severely affected. Poor, poor kitties in the past. Advances in veterinary dentistry have resulted in a more compassionate and preemptive approach to dental care for our animals. The emphasis has shifted from dealing with disease alone, to trying to prevent it. That is why you find us so frequently recommending teeth cleaning for your cat. We want to avoid the painful process of diseased gums and teeth.

The more routine dental care we do, the more convinced we become of its benefit to your cat. Owners frequently comment that they did not think their cat was having trouble, but they noticed a marked improvement after the dental procedure.

Your cat will need to be sedated so that we can thoroughly evaluate, get xrays, and clean under the gum line. In order to evaluate your cat's basic physiologic condition, we recommend preanesthetic testing prior to anesthesia. We always give medicine to prevent pain and monitor your cat closely while using anesthesia. If we find erosions in the enamel or significant disease under the gum line, the tooth will need to be removed. Don't let the removal of a tooth distress you. Your cat will truly feel better after the bad tooth is gone. The ability to eat hard food is rarely affected. After the teeth have been cleaned and the diseased areas are treated, the teeth will be polished. If the gums appear to be infected, we will send home antibiotics for you to give your cat at home. We will also show you how to brush your cats' teeth. If your cat will tolerate it, brushing really helps keep the mouth healthy. We'll recommend using one of the commercial dental diets as they have been shown to help as well.

We want to keep your cat well and pain-free, and our recommendations for dental care are based on that commitment. We hope this handout has helped you to understand why we feel that dental care for your cat is so important.

HOME DENTAL CARE

Just as with people, good dental hygiene will result in a healthier mouth for your cat. You might ask, "Why do I have to bother with this? Haven't cats been surviving just fine for thousands of years without some human trying to stick a toothbrush in their mouth?"

Before the 1950s, cats, for the most part, were eating a whole lot of animals that they caught while hunting. Their teeth are marvelously adapted to shearing off heads and wings. Unpleasant as it is for us humans to think about, those feathers, tendons and skin did a great job at flossing the teeth. Enter commercial diets. They are small pieces of ground up rice, corn or soybean. We all know what the dentist says to us about what will happen if we put high carbohydrate stuff in our mouths without proper cleaning. Well, the same thing happens with cats and dogs. You change the form of the food going into the mouth as well as the composition, and, voila, you have tartar, gingivitis and holes in the teeth.

We have pushed the average life expectancy of cats up to 18 years. We've done this by providing them with good veterinary care, giving them commercial diets, and keeping them inside, out of harm's way. The trade off for the additional 7 or 8 years that we've bought them is that we have to deal with keeping their teeth from developing problems as described on the other side of this handout. Providing good dental care is a small price to pay for being able to keep these fine creatures with us longer.

The best time to start cleaning your cat's teeth is after the adult teeth have erupted (at about 6 - 7 months), or after the teeth have been cleaned. You don't have to get inside the mouth or clean the inside surface of the teeth in most cases. The worst disease seems to occur along the gums of the teeth on the side. Luckily, the surface facing the cheek is usually the part affected. YIPPEE! That means all you have to do is slide a brush under the lip and rub a little.

We will show you the technique we use so you can clean your cat's teeth at home. Please make sure that you've seen one of the staff demonstrate the technique before you try it at home. You'll want to take several weeks or even a couple of months to train your cat to accept brushing. Check out the Cornell Feline Health Videos about this. There is a link on the resources page of our website. Once you've got the system down, try to clean your cat's teeth twice a week. 30 seconds per side should do the trick. Here are some of the high points. Place your cat on a counter with your arm over the back and your hand over the head. It helps to have your pinkie behind the ear that is away from you and your thumb and index finger on either side of the muzzle. Have your hand on the head as though it is a big gearshift knob. Feel that you have control of the head. Use your thumb on one side to pull back a little on the lip. Have the brush in your dominant hand. Slide the brush into the side of the mouth and brush on the outside surface of the teeth on that side. Use your index finger to pull back the lip on the opposite side and brush there.

Now I can just see a look of skepticism on your face right now. It's true. Not every cat will let you clean its teeth at home. Certainly don't attempt it if you feel that you will be injured. Some cats just won't allow themselves to be restrained in order to do this. But if your cat WILL let you do this, you will be buying your cat a healthier mouth.