

# Dental Disease and Oral Health in Dogs and Cats

Dental disease is one of the most underdiagnosed conditions in companion animals. Studies show that by the age of three, **over 70% of cats and 80% of dogs** already show signs of dental or periodontal disease. Left untreated, oral bacteria can cause chronic pain, tooth loss, and even damage to the heart, kidneys, and liver. Routine dental care—both professional and at home—is essential for maintaining your pet’s overall wellbeing.

# 1 UNDERSTANDING DENTAL DISEASE

## 1. PLAQUE AND TARTAR FORMATION

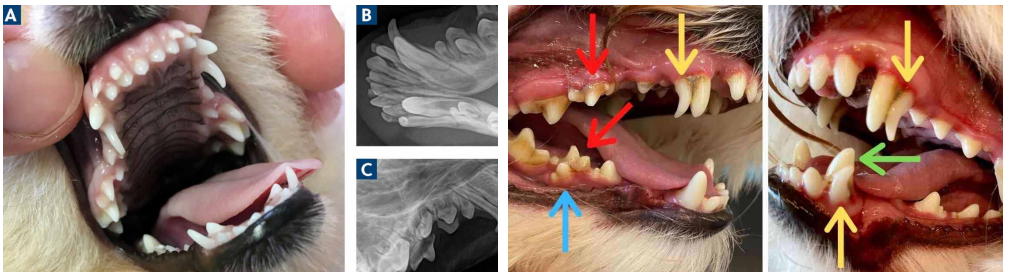
- Food particles and bacteria form plaque within hours after eating.
- If not brushed away, plaque hardens into tartar (calculus), which irritates gums and harbours bacteria.
- This bacterial film causes gingivitis (gum inflammation) that can progress to periodontitis—irreversible loss of bone and tissue supporting the teeth.

## 2. FELINE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

- Cats can develop Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions (FORLs)—painful defects below the gumline that may not be visible externally.
- These are only detectable on dental x-rays and require extraction of the affected teeth.

## 3. BREED PREDISPOSITIONS

- Small and toy-breed dogs (like Pugs, Poodles, Yorkies, Shih Tzus) often have crowded teeth that trap debris. Some pets even have retained baby teeth that need to be extracted as soon as possible, so the adult teeth can erupt and align normally.
- Cats with chronic gingivostomatitis may suffer immune-mediated inflammation requiring tailored treatment (often whole mouth extractions to keep them pain free)





## RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

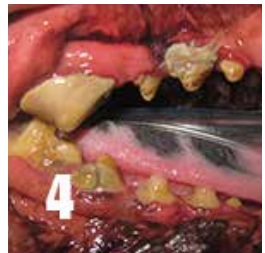
- Bad breath (halitosis)
- Red or bleeding gums
- Visible brown deposits on teeth
- Drooling or pawing at the mouth
- Difficulty chewing or dropping food
- Swelling under the eye or jaw
- Reluctance to eat dry food or loss of appetite





# DENTAL GRADING

| GRADE   | DESCRIPTION                              | RECOMMENDED CARE  |
|---------|--|---|
| Grade 1 | Mild tartar, minimal redness             | Begin home brushing routine and reassess in 2-3 months.                             |
| Grade 2 | Moderate tartar, gingivitis present      | Dental cleaning under general anaesthesia; start daily dental hygiene post recovery |
| Grade 3 | Advanced gingivitis, possible bone loss  | X-rays, cleaning, and selective extractions as needed.                              |
| Grade 4 | Severe bone loss, loose or painful teeth | Multiple extractions likely; long-term home care and soft food recommended.         |





## WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR VET VISIT

- Pre-anaesthetic examination and bloodwork to ensure safety under anaesthesia
- Full dental cleaning and X-rays under general anaesthesia.
- Extractions performed only when indicated. Dissolvable sutures are used in the mouth
- Post-procedure pain relief and home-care guidance.
- A long-term oral hygiene plan tailored to your pet's needs.



## DIAGNOSTIC AND TREATMENT APPROACH

### 1. COMPREHENSIVE ORAL EXAMINATION UNDER ANAESTHESIA

- A full dental assessment can ONLY be done safely under general anaesthesia, allowing the vet to examine below the gumline and perform ultrasonic scaling and polishing.
- Sedation-free “awake cleanings” are not recommended because they are ineffective and can cause stress or serious injury.

### 2. DENTAL X-RAYS

- The gold standard in veterinary dentistry.
- Reveal hidden pathology such as abscesses, retained roots, or resorptive lesions.
- Essential for planning extractions or confirming complete tooth removal.

### 3. PROFESSIONAL CLEANING & EXTRACTIONS

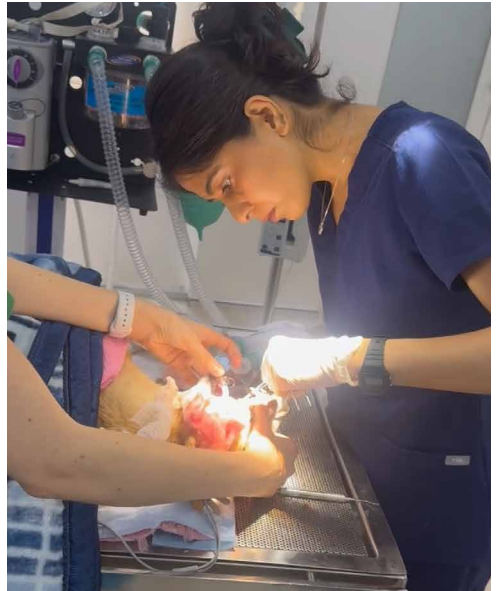
- Scaling removes plaque and tartar above and below the gumline.
- Polishing smooths enamel to slow future plaque accumulation.
- Extractions are performed only when absolutely necessary to relieve pain or infection.



## HOME CARE AND PREVENTION

### BRUSHING

- Daily brushing with a pet-safe enzymatic toothpaste is the most effective preventive step.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush or finger brush or dental wipes/gauze wrapped on finger
- Introduce gradually using positive reinforcement—start by letting your pet lick the toothpaste off the brush.

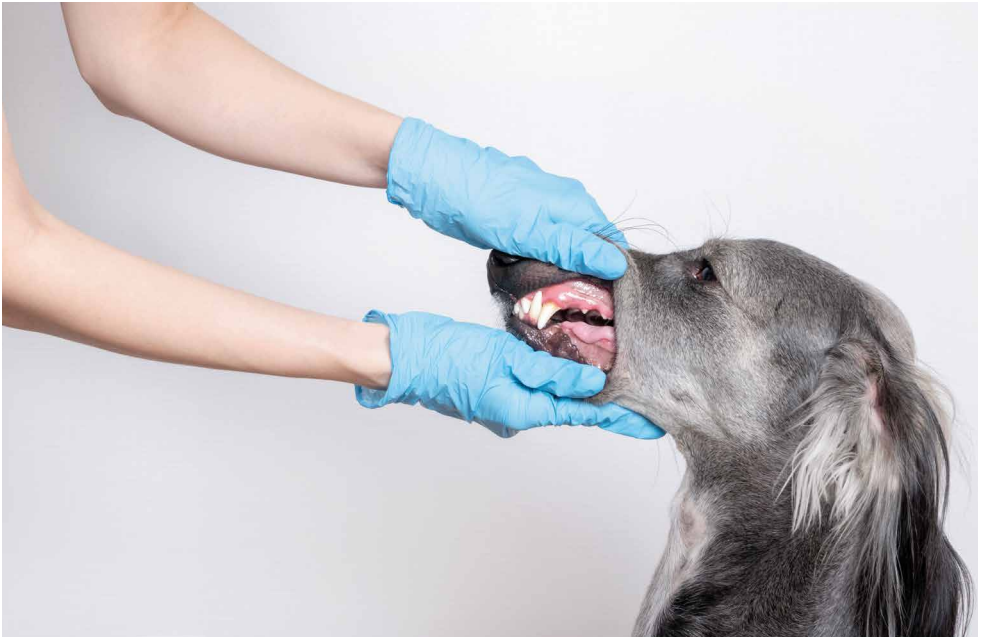


## DENTAL DIETS AND CHEWS

- Veterinary dental diets (VOHC-approved) mechanically clean teeth while chewing.
- Dental chews or water additives can help reduce plaque but should complement - NOT REPLACE - brushing.

## REGULAR VETERINARY CHECK-UPS

- Oral exams every 6—12 months.
- Early detection allows minor problems to be treated before they become painful or costly.



# Myth vs. Fact

## MYTH BUSTING SOME COMMON INACCURACIES



“Bad breath is normal in older pets.”



“Anesthesia-free cleanings are safer.”



“Tooth loss means my pet can't eat properly.”



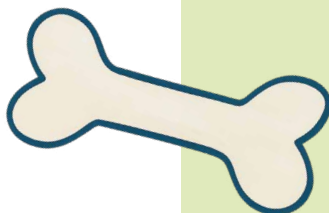
**It's not. Bad breath is a sign of bacterial infection or gum disease.**

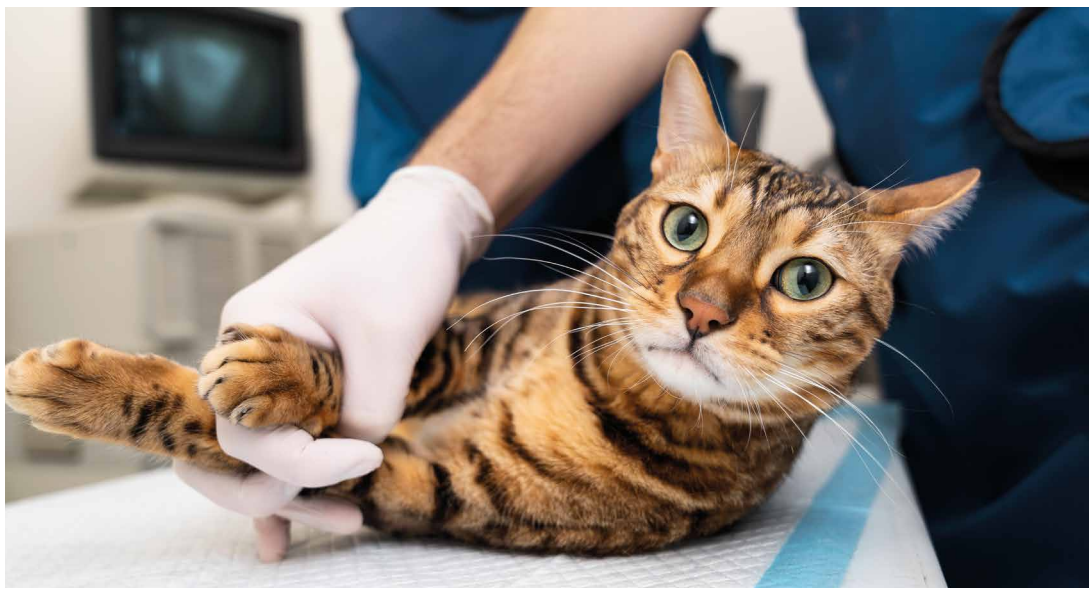


**They are ineffective and stressful. Proper cleaning requires anaesthesia for thorough and painless care.**



**Pets adapt well to eating soft food and are more comfortable after painful, infected teeth are removed.**





## SUMMARY CHECKLIST

### FOR PET PARENTS

- Schedule annual dental evaluations.
- Brush daily with pet-safe toothpaste.
- Provide approved dental diets or chews.
- Monitor for signs of oral discomfort.
- Never ignore bad breath or drooling—it's often the first sign of disease.



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