

Dental Disease in Dogs

How and why you need to prevent dental disease in dogs of all ages.

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Dental disease (periodontal infection) is the most common infectious disease in dogs. It's estimated that 90 percent of pets 1 to 3 years of age have enough tartar accumulation on their teeth to necessitate a professional dental cleaning in a veterinarian's office. Fortunately, dental disease is also among the easiest to prevent and treat. Here are some helpful suggestions to help you deal with dental disease in your dog.

1. Dental disease is not simply cosmetic; it's a true infection in your dog's body. Problems including diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, and liver disease have been linked to oral bacteria in people and dogs with periodontal infections. All dogs must have their teeth cleaned as often as necessary, according to their individual needs.
2. Accumulation of infected tartar on your dog's teeth will eventually lead to periodontal pain, tooth loss and systemic infection. Many older dogs that seem to be "acting old," will be restored to youthful health once their teeth are clean and the infection is removed from their body. One of the most important tasks you can perform to restore health to an older dog is to clean its teeth regularly.
3. To properly and thoroughly clean a dog's teeth, anesthesia must be used. Simply scraping the tartar off the teeth ("anesthesia-free dental cleaning") will not cure dental disease and may actually cause more harm to the teeth, gums and supporting structures of the jaw. As long as the proper anesthetic is used, and as long as pets are carefully monitored by an assistant and an anesthetic monitoring machine (which measures heart rate, respiratory rate and oxygen saturation), most dogs, including older dogs, usually do well under anesthesia for dental cleaning.
4. Natural therapies, such as coenzyme Q10 and arnica, are helpful for treating pets with dental disease.
5. For ongoing dental care, do as much as possible at home. Regular home dental care (brushing the dog's teeth) will reduce the number of professional dental cleanings that need to be performed by the veterinarian.