

Dog Dental Facts

- Puppies have 28 temporary teeth that erupt at about three to four weeks of age. They have 42 permanent teeth that begin to emerge at about four months.
- Symptoms of gum disease in dogs include yellow and brown build-up of tartar along the gum line, inflamed gums and persistent bad breath.
- Broken teeth are a common problem, especially among outdoor dogs. According to veterinary dental experts, aggressive chewing on hard objects, such as commercially available cow hooves, is a primary cause of broken teeth in dogs.

Cat Dental Facts

- Kittens have 26 temporary teeth that begin to erupt at about two to three weeks of age. They have 30 permanent teeth that erupt at about three to four months.
- Symptoms of periodontal disease in cats include yellow and brown tartar buildup along the gum line, red inflamed gums, and persistent bad breath.
- Cats can develop painful cervical line lesions. Studies show that about 28 percent of domestic cats develop at least one of these painful lesions during their lifetime.

Chew on These Facts

Oral disease is the most frequently diagnosed health problem for pets

- An astounding 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show signs of oral disease by age three, according to the American Veterinary Dental Society (AVDS).

Oral disease begins with a buildup of bacteria in the pet's mouth

- Bacteria, combined with saliva and food debris between the tooth and gum, can cause plaque formulations that accumulate on the tooth. As bacteria grow in the plaque and as calcium salts are deposited, plaque turns to tartar.
- If tartar is not removed from the teeth, pockets of pus may appear along the gum line and further separate the teeth from the gum, which allows more food and bacteria to accumulate.
- Without proper treatment, this plaque and tartar buildup may cause periodontal disease, which affects the tissue and structure supporting the teeth.

Periodontitis is irreversible and may lead to other health problems

- Unlike the inflamed gums of gingivitis, which can be treated and reversed with thorough plaque removal and continued plaque control, periodontitis can only be contained to prevent progression. The disease causes red, swollen and tender gums, receding gums, bleeding, pain and bad breath. If left untreated, periodontitis can lead to tooth loss.
- The infection caused by periodontal disease may enter the bloodstream, potentially infecting the heart, liver and kidneys.

Pet owners should look for warning signs of oral disease

- Common indications of oral disease include bad breath, a change in eating or chewing habits, pawing at the face or mouth and depression.
- If any of these signs are present, the pet should be taken to the veterinarian for a dental exam.

The good news is that pet owners can reduce the risk of oral disease by following AVDS recommendations

- The first step in preventing oral disease is a routine physical examination including a dental exam.
- Pet owners should practice a regular dental care regimen at home, which may include brushing the pet's teeth with specially formulated toothpaste. It's best to start early, but grown dogs and cats can learn to tolerate brushing. Toothpaste for humans is not recommended because it may upset the pet's stomach.
- Schedule regular follow-up care with your family veterinarian and ask about specially formulated foods with proven benefits in plaque and tartar removal.