

## **Tooth Brushing and Dental Prophylaxis in Dogs**

### **Why should I brush my dog's teeth?**

Daily removal of plaque is the key to an oral hygiene program. Unless your pet's teeth are brushed daily, plaque, which is an accumulation of bacteria, will build up at the gum line. Eventually calculus forms further irritating the gums. The infection then progresses to loosen and destroy the attachment of the tooth. In addition to loose teeth, infection can spread to the liver, kidneys, and heart.

### **How can I brush my animal's teeth?**

First pick a soft-bristled, or finger toothbrush. Next, get toothpaste from your veterinarian. DO NOT use human toothpaste because it has detergents that should not be swallowed. Using a gauze pad will also work.

### **How often does my pet need to have teeth cleaned by the veterinarian?**

It depends on the degree of plaque and tartar accumulation. Look for an accumulation of yellow or brown material at the area where the tooth meets the gum line. Once you notice accumulation, it is time for a professional cleaning. Attached to the tartar are bacteria, which irritate gum tissues. When treated, the inflammation will resolve. When gingivitis is left untreated, it will progress to periodontitis, which is non-curable.

### **Do you have to use anesthesia to clean my pet's teeth?**

Anesthesia is necessary when performing teeth cleaning. Anesthesia provides three important functions: immobilization in order to clean below the gum line, pain control, and the ability to place a tube into the windpipe, so bacterial products do not enter the respiratory system.

### **I am concerned about the anesthesia. Is it safe?**

We take every effort to provide safe anesthesia. We use gas anesthetic agents; dogs are given pre-operative tests, depending on their age and condition, to qualify them for anesthesia. Patients are monitored while anesthetized, both visibly and with similar monitoring devices as used in human hospitals.

### **What is the best food for my pet?**

Hard food will remove plaque from teeth. There are special diets specifically manufactured to help control plaque. Feeding the special diets in conjunction with daily brushing is the best to keep the teeth clean. Diet alone will not control plaque, but it will help.

### **How can I tell if my pet is suffering from periodontal disease?**

The leading sign is bad breath caused from infection.

### **What can be done if my pet has periodontal disease?**

It occurs when tooth support structures are affected by infection. In the beginning stages, cleaning above and below the gum line, as well as removal of calculus attached to the tooth will help restore periodontal health. In advanced cases, either periodontal surgery or extractions are performed. Antibiotics given monthly also help to control the progression.