



# Dental Disease and Your Pet

By Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

At each and every visit to the veterinarian, your pet's oral cavity and teeth should be examined. According to The American Veterinary Dental Association, 70% of cats and 80% of dogs develop periodontal disease by the age of three. Genetics do play a part. I have seen some dogs and cats that need to have a full dental cleaning every year. Yet, there are others that require the procedure every three or four years. Dental disease is characterized by gingivitis, plaque and calculus. Gingivitis is inflammation of the gums. Plaque is bacteria that develop from food particles that adheres to the outer surface of teeth. Calculus occurs when plaque becomes mineralized and adheres to teeth. Each time your pet eats, the potential for inflammation of the gums, bacterial growth and eventually hard calculus, exists. Additional signs of dental disease include bleeding gums, bad breath, grinding or "chattering" of teeth, eroded, broken or blunt ended teeth, increased drooling, reluctance to eat or play with toys, even lethargy and depression.

Good dental care begins at home when your pet is young and is monitored by you, the caretaker, on a daily basis, and professionally, by your veterinarian at annual check-ups. It is easy to get your puppy or kitten used to brushing their teeth when they are young. Studies show that brushing your pet's teeth regularly can extend their life by up to three years. Left untreated, gingivitis will progress to more serious periodontal disease that causes pain and allows bacteria to enter the bloodstream and potentially damage other organs. The liver, kidneys, heart, intestines, joints and the liver can be affected to such a degree that organ failure, sepsis, and death can occur.

Correctly performed, a complete dental cleaning and evaluation for your dog or cat involves anesthesia. As such, it is necessary to get pre-anesthetic blood work to ensure that all organ systems, such as the liver and kidneys, are all functioning properly to minimize anesthetic complications. There are some individuals out there that are proponents of dental cleaning without anesthesia. I am not one of them. This procedure needs to be done by a veterinary

professional with the ability to address any issues that come up after evaluation, such as a tooth extraction.

*Dr. Rose DiLeva is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine. She can be reached at her Animal Wellness Center in Chadds Ford, PA at 610-558-1616 for appointments and telephone consultations. Her web site is [www.altpetdoc.com](http://www.altpetdoc.com) and [www.drrosesremedies.com](http://www.drrosesremedies.com)*



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Dr. Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

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