

TAKING CARE OF THOSE PEARLY WHITES

By Gillian Ridgeway

It is February, so this means it is Pet Dental Month. This has always been a great opportunity for the Veterinary community to shed some light on this area, as pet owners can easily overlook it.

Just like for humans, pet dental care includes regular maintenance. It is important to look in your pet's mouth. By looking in the mouth you will start to observe what is normal for your pet and if there have been any changes. Take a close look at the teeth and make sure they are in good condition. Note if there are any chips or tartar on the teeth and even make a note of the color. The next thing to examine is the gums. The gums should not be inflamed. Pay close attention to the base of the tooth. While examining your pet's teeth and gums, note any wart-type growths and report any finding that look unfamiliar to your Veterinarian.

Pay close attention to the diet you feed your pet. If you are feeding only canned or semi-moist food, this will often lead to dental problems later on. Genetics can also play a part and while all pets are prone to dental problems as they mature, some breeds can have issues in this area earlier in their lives.

Problems with the mouth or teeth can often result in a foul smell to the breath of your pet. While you may initially want to mask this by using a pet mouth spray, or mint flavored biscuits, it is quite important to get to the root of the problem. Bacteria can accumulate in the mouth, and quickly travel into the body. Dental problems, if left unattended, may lead to problems with the organs of the body.

Maintaining a dental schedule is the best method of defense. There are many options available on the market today. Pet toothbrushes and paste are now commonly found. One of the easiest tools to use is the "finger" brush. This small device looks like the end of a glove. It is made of latex and easily goes over your finger. It has small bristles on the end. It is quite easy to maneuver in the pet's mouth. While tooth brushes can be slightly more awkward to use because you need to see the inside of your pet's mouth, the finger brush allows you to reach all areas of the teeth, even the back, with a minimum of fuss. Remember, it is important to use toothpaste formulated especially for pets (it is non-foaming....they don't rinse and spit ☺)

If you do find that your pet has an excess of tartar built up on the teeth, it is best to make an appointment with your Veterinarian and have the teeth descaled. Once they are sparkly clean, you will find the maintenance easier. It is difficult for pet owner to remove the tartar.

So, keeping this all in mind, it may be time to make a dental check up appointment soon, your dog will thank you.