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Oral Hygiene & Your Dog's Health

It's a fact. Most dog owners never take a good look inside their dog's mouth. And that's unfortunate because it is estimated that over 80 percent have significant oral pathology. Every day veterinarians are presented with patients for routine vaccinations or other minor afflictions whose oral health status is truly cause for alarm. Upon displaying the dog's loose teeth, sore and infected gums, and rotting tooth sockets to the dog's owner, the response usually is one of surprise and shock.

"Well, she does seem to have bad breath, Doctor" is the usual reply. "But I'm sure at her age she can't have anything done now." Yet the continual presence of bacteria and their associated toxins have a daily impact on the dog's health; anything we can do to change that for the better is appropriate.

Partly because the mouth is warm, moist and has significant nutrients present for organisms to grow on, the oral cavity of dogs is a perfect incubator for all kinds of bacteria. Most are normal and natural but once plaque and calculus form on the teeth the normal microbial flora gets out of balance and if pathogenic organisms proliferate, trouble ensues.

Far too often veterinarians discover during the physical exam that their canine subject has a foul odor to the breath as a result

of generalized periodontitis. But foul breath is a mere shadow of a much more insidious disease process.

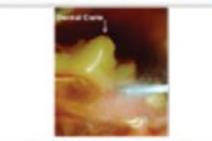
Far better than extracting teeth, performing gingival flaps, filling erosions or doing root canal procedures, would be to prevent the health damaging periodontal disease in the first place.

Prevention

One of the best ways to insure optimum oral health is to provide the dog with a well-balanced, meat-based dog food (such as premium quality kibble foods). Meat assists in keeping the mouth environment healthy. Actively encouraging the dog to utilise chew treats that require some "exercising" of the teeth, such as is provided by compressed rawhide chewies, hard rubber or nylon chew toys, can assist in keeping the mouth structures vital. Brushing the dog's teeth can be a big help, too, but needs to be done almost daily.

One study in the Journal of Veterinary Dentistry, December, 1996, reported "Tooth-brushing every other day did not maintain clinically healthy gingiva in dogs. The daily addition of a dental hygiene chew to a regimen of tooth brushing every other day reduced the gingivitis scores and reduced the accumulation of dental deposits (plaque, calculus and stain). Daily tooth-brushing should be the recommendation to the dog owner irrespective of dietary regimen."



<p>Gingivitis - inflammation of the gums.</p>	
<p>Periodontitis - a general term for a disease of the oral cavity that attacks the gum and bone and delicate tissues around the teeth.</p>	
<p>Pyorrhea - inflammation of the gums and tooth sockets, often leading to loosening of the teeth and accompanied by pus.</p>	
<p>Caries - an area of decalcification of the tooth enamel leading to cavities in the tooth. Caries are very rare in dogs.</p>	
<p>Plaque - the first buildup of material adhering to tooth enamel. Composed of a mix of intercellular matrix of bacteria, salivary polymers, remnants of epithelial cells and white blood cells, it can cause caries, calculi buildup and periodontal disease.</p>	
<p>Calculus (Tartar) - calcium carbonate and calcium phosphate combined with organic material, deposited on the surface of the tooth.</p>	

Newer dental care products that include antiseptic impregnated chews, canine appropriate tooth brushes, and even flavored tooth pastes to "reward" the dog for allowing the brushing are available. Also important are routine oral hygiene visits where under general anesthesia the patient can undergo ultrasonic teeth cleaning, close inspection of teeth and gingiva, and assessment of overall oral health.

Addressing problems when they are minor and preventing the health damaging effects of bacterial contamination and systemic toxin release are immeasurably beneficial to the dog's long-term health status.

We dog owners need to pay closer attention to our dog's oral health status. And that begins with the simple task of looking closely at the dog's mouth.

Source: http://www.petmd.com/dog/grooming/evr_dg_oral_hygiene_and_your_dogs_health?page=2

Dental Care for Pets

Believe it or not, taking care of your pet's teeth is as important as looking after your own - proper dental care for pets is critical to their overall health.

Plaque and tartar

Saliva, bacteria and food particles combine to form plaque every day. Plaque is the film you feel on your teeth in the

morning when you wake up. Within 24 hours the plaque may begin to turn into tartar, a hard yellowish deposit on the teeth. Plaque also causes gingivitis – an infection of the gums - that is the first stage of periodontal disease.

A problem at all ages

Dental disease is more common as pets get older. The major cause of gum disease is accumulation of plaque, which contains a large number of bacteria. These bacteria can spread to the lungs, liver, kidney and heart, causing infection there. Periodontal disease is painful, even though your pet may not show it.

Tell-tale signs

Your vet will be able to spot any problems during your pet's check-up, but until then, here are some things to look out for:

- Bad breath – bad breath is not normal!
- Yellow and brown tartar deposits on the teeth – normal teeth should always be white
- A red line along the gum line (gingivitis)
- Difficulty eating
- Bleeding gums

A good brush

There are 3 parts to taking care of your pet's teeth:

- 1) Regular tooth brushing
- 2) A special food that works like a toothbrush
- 3) Regular check-ups with your vet – every 6 months or AT LEAST once a year

Brushing will be easier if you begin while your pet is still young, although you may have success even if you start with an older pet, provided he/she doesn't already have painful gum disease.

Don't use toothpaste designed for people, as there are pastes specially designed for pets that are safer. Ask your vet or vet nurse what he or she would recommend and get them to show you what to do.

You should brush your pet's teeth at least once a week, but once a day is best.

Special food

In addition to, or instead of, tooth brushing, you can use a special food. Hill's Prescription Diet t/d™ has a unique structure and size that helps reduce plaque, tartar and gingivitis. Regular dry food does not remove plaque.





This is the simplest way of making sure your pet's teeth get some form of 'brushing' each day.

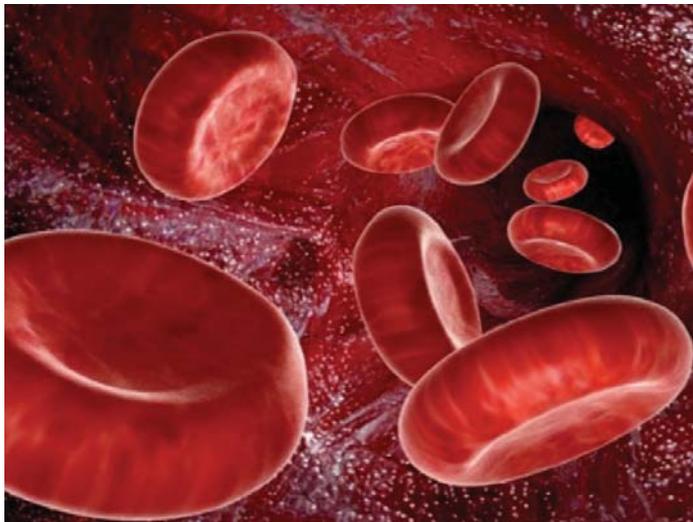
Remember to see your vet regularly - keeping your pet's teeth in good condition is essential for her overall health.

Source: Hill's PVA & Marketing 2010/11, Sydney / Image courtesy of Hill's Pet Nutrition 2011.

Von Willebrand's Disease in Dogs

Von Willebrand's is an inherited bleeding disorder and the most common inherited bleeding disorder among dogs.

The condition is similar to hemophilia in humans. There are three classifications of Von Willebrand's disease; Type 1, type 2, and type 3.



In type 1 von Willebrand's factor functions properly, but is only present in low amounts. Type 1 is the most common of all three classifications.

Type 2 is characterized by having vWF which does not function properly.

In the type 3 classification of Von Willebrand's there is almost zero vWF present.

Causes of Von Willebrand's Disease

Von Willebrand's disease is inherited. This means that it is passed down from parents to offspring.

Symptoms of Von Willebrand's Disease

In Von Willebrand's disease prolonged or excessive bleeding is the major symptom. This can be seen when surgery is performed, with injuries, when a female is in heat, or when nails are clipped. In some cases spontaneous bleeding will occur from the gums or nose. As with most diseases symptoms can range from mild, with bleeding times only being extended slightly, to severe, where bleeding cannot be stopped.

Knowing if your dog has this condition before an emergency situation arises can mean the difference between life and death. Similar to haemophilia in humans, von Willebrand's disease can result in life-threatening bleeding. Many dogs that carry this disease in their genetic makeup go undetected until a minor surgery or small, superficial injury results in significant blood loss.



PKVH offers testing for this disease, which is an inheritable trait in some breeds. As many as 76% of Dobermans in Australia are either carriers or affected; other commonly affected breeds include Golden Retrievers, German shepherds, German shorthaired and wirehaired pointers, Chesapeake Bay retrievers, Pembroke Welsh corgis, poodles, Scottish and Manchester terriers, and Shetland sheepdogs. If you have an at-risk breed, we recommend that you have your dog tested.

Some animals show no signs of the disease but are carriers of this genetic problem. If these dogs are allowed to reproduce, they can pass the disease on to their offspring. If you are a breeder, we strongly recommend testing for von Willebrand's disease before breeding your dogs.

Please call us to schedule this test.

Source: <http://www.akcchf.org/canine-health/your-dogs-health/disease-information/von-willebrand-s-disease.html#sthash.v1UR-WUWb.dpuf>

Pyometra in Dogs

Pyometra is an infection in the uterus. It is serious and life threatening condition that must be treated promptly and aggressively.

Pyometra is often the result of hormonal changes in the reproductive tract. During estrus ("heat"), white blood cells are removed from the uterus to allow safe passage of the sperm. This lapse in protection often leads to infection. Also following estrus ("heat"), progesterone levels remain elevated for 8-10 weeks and thicken the lining of the uterus in preparation for pregnancy. If pregnancy does not occur for

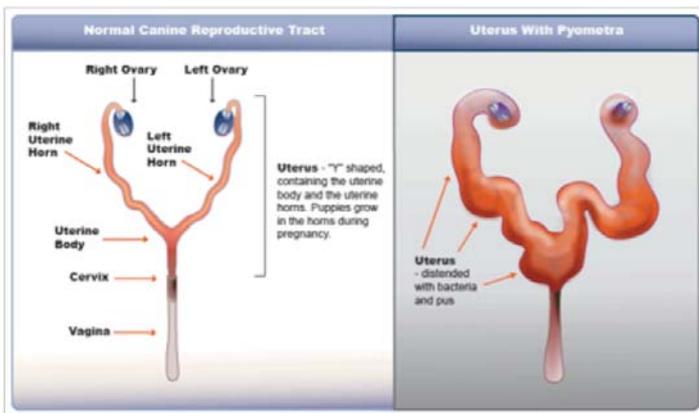




several estrus cycles, the lining continues to increase in thickness until cysts form within it. The thickened, cystic lining secretes fluids that create an ideal environment in which bacteria can grow. Additionally, high progesterone levels inhibit the ability of the muscles in the wall of the uterus to contract.

Are there other situations that cause the changes in the uterus?

Yes. The use of progesterone-based drugs can do this. In addition, estrogen will increase the effects of progesterone on the uterus. Drugs containing both hormones are used to treat certain conditions of the reproductive system.



How do bacteria get into the uterus?

The cervix is the gateway to the uterus. It remains tightly closed except during estrus. When it is open, bacteria that are normally found in the vagina can enter the uterus rather easily. If the uterus is normal, the environment is adverse to bacterial survival; however, when the uterine wall is thickened and cystic, perfect conditions exist for bacterial growth. In addition, when these abnormal conditions exist, the muscles of the uterus cannot contract properly. This means that bacteria that enter the uterus cannot be expelled.

When does it occur?

Pyometra may occur in young to middle-aged dogs; however, it is most common in older dogs. After many years of estrus cycles without pregnancy, the uterine wall undergoes the changes that promote this disease.

The typical time for pyometra to occur is about two to eight weeks after estrus ("heat cycle").

What are the clinical signs of a dog with pyometra?

The clinical signs depend on whether or not the cervix is open. If it is open, pus will drain from the uterus through the vagina to the outside. It is often noted on the skin or hair under the tail or on bedding and furniture where the dog has

laid. Fever, lethargy, anorexia, and depression may or may not be present as well as excessive thirst and vomiting.

If the cervix is closed, pus that forms is not able to drain to the outside. It collects in the uterus causing distention of the abdomen. The bacteria release toxins that are absorbed into circulation. These dogs often become severely ill very rapidly. They are anorectic, very listless, and very depressed. Vomiting or diarrhea may be present.

Toxins from the bacteria affect the kidney's ability to retain fluid. Increased urine production occurs, and the dog drinks an excess of water. This occurs in both open- and closed-cervix pyometra.

How is it diagnosed?

Dogs that are seen early in the disease may have a slight vaginal discharge and show no other signs of illness. However, most dogs with pyometra are not seen until later in the illness. A very ill female dog that is drinking an increased amount of water and has not been spayed is always suspected of having pyometra. This is especially true if there is a vaginal discharge or painful, enlarged abdomen.

Dogs with pyometra can have a marked elevation of the white blood cell count and may often have an elevation of globulins (a type of protein produced by the immune system) in the blood. The specific gravity of the urine is very low due to the toxic effects of the bacteria on the kidneys. However, all of these abnormalities may be present in any dog with a major bacterial infection.

If the cervix is closed, radiographs (x-rays) of the abdomen may help identify the enlarged uterus. If the cervix is open, there will often be such minimal uterine enlargement that the radiograph will not be conclusive. An ultrasound examination can also be helpful in identifying an enlarged uterus and differentiating that from a normal pregnancy

How is it treated?

The treatment is to surgically remove the uterus and ovaries. This is called an ovariohysterectomy ("spey"). Dogs diagnosed in the early stage of the disease are good surgical candidates. However, most dogs are diagnosed when they are quite ill so the surgery is not as routine as the same surgery in a healthy dog. Intravenous fluids are often needed before and after surgery. Antibiotics are given for 1-2 weeks.

Pyometra can be a life-threatening condition. It involves a large source of infection within the body which can set off a cascade of events we struggle to stop, resulting in bleeding and organ failure and can result in death.

All of this is preventable with sterilisation.

Source: <http://www.universityvet.com/resource/pyometra-dogs>

