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Getting to the root of the problem

Help prevent a dental disaster!

We all know that cleaning our teeth is essential to good oral hygiene. It keeps our teeth strong and healthy, helps prevent painful conditions such as Gingivitis and keeps dangerous bacteria to a minimum. Left unchecked, bacteria can enter the blood stream and increase your risk of potentially fatal heart disease. But did you know that many of the same considerations also apply to our pets?

Cleaning your dog or cat's teeth is often a job that is overlooked, with many responsible pet owners simply unaware of the dangers of leaving their pet's teeth unattended to. And it isn't surprising. Misconceptions surrounding teeth cleaning and a plethora of products on the market that claim to achieve similar results to regular brushing, are leading to confusion around the subject. The bottom line is that failing to clean your pet's teeth can have serious consequences including: swollen, sore gums, infection, heart and kidney problems and possible painful tooth extraction. Ouch!

Here at Blacks, we are passionate about raising awareness of good pet dental hygiene so that we can prevent unnecessary suffering amongst our furry and four legged friends. After all, our pets have no voice to tell us when something is wrong and may be experiencing undetected dental pain for a long time before the cause is determined.

So, what are the signs that we should look out for and what can we do at home to prevent harmful dental conditions? Here are our top tips:

Open wide.....

1. Look in your pet's mouth every week for signs of dental disease and ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my pet's breath smell bad? Has the smell become noticeably stronger?

- Is my pet eating normally? Animals rarely stop eating altogether even in severe cases of dental disease, but may change how they eat. For example, they may only eat on one side of their mouth or gulp their food instead of chewing.
- Are they pawing frequently at their face or mouth?
- Are they drooling excessively?
- Do the teeth look healthy? Are any misaligned, discoloured or broken?
- Do the gums look pale pink and healthy? Are any areas red, swollen or bleeding?
- Can you see any yellow/brown tartar build-up around the gum line?
- Are there any unusual bumps or growths within the mouth?
- Are they behaving differently? Are they withdrawn, lethargic or irritable?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, make an appointment to see a vet as soon as possible.

2. Invest in the right equipment. Good veterinary surgeries, pet shops and online retailers sell specially designed pet toothbrushes and toothpaste. NEVER use human toothpaste as the fluoride contained in them is poisonous to animals. Pet toothpastes are flavoured to appeal to animals and will ultimately make the process easier if your dog or cat is attracted by the scent. To celebrate National Smile Month (15th May – 15th June) **Blacks Vets are offering 30% off all pet toothbrushes and toothpastes.** Call in to your local branch in Dudley, Lye, Quinton, Sedgley or Oldbury.

3. Establish a regular cleaning routine. We recommend cleaning your pet's teeth every day for optimum effect, but even brushing 3

or 4 times a week can make a big difference to oral health. Choose a time when your pet is relaxed and let them sniff or lick a little of the toothpaste from your finger. Let them get used to the sensation of having their mouths touched and opened. Try rubbing a little paste on to their gums with your finger so they also become familiar with the motion. This process can take 4-8 weeks so don't feel under pressure to rush. Once they are accustomed to the process, apply a little paste to the brush and gently encourage them to open their mouth. Don't worry if you don't manage to clean all their teeth on your first attempt. It may take several goes to build up confidence in the procedure from both parties! Consistency is important so try to set aside the same time each day to clean, so that your pet becomes comfortable with the process. For example, many owners clean their pet's teeth after coat grooming when they are still and calm. Keep aiming for a little longer with each try and be sure to give lots of fuss and praise after each clean.

4. Consider how your pet is fed. Though not possible in all cases, dry food is generally better for teeth than wet as the abrasive texture means that less food sticks to teeth. Blacks Vets recommend Royal Canin pet foods and their excellent dental kibble can be used exclusively or mixed with existing food. Your vet will be able to advise on the suitability of switching to dry food according to your pet's own circumstances.

5. Be cautious with dental chews. These are often laden with calories and don't last long enough to do an adequate cleaning job. Using dental chews and toys should NEVER replace a regular tooth brushing regime.

Have your pet's teeth regularly checked by a qualified vet or nurse. Whilst home maintenance can do much to prevent dental disease, most pets will need some form of dental care from their vet during their lifetime. Here at Blacks, we offer twice yearly dental checks as part of our Protect My Pet Club as well as great savings on some dental procedures such as Scale & Polish. Being proactive when it comes to dental hygiene will not only save your pet from suffering unnecessarily, but also be more cost effective in the long run.

Visit www.blacksvets.co.uk for further details.

Case Study

You can clearly see thick tartar build up in this dog's mouth which has caused the gums to recede. This would almost certainly have meant that the dog was experiencing pain, yet he was still managing to eat his normal quantity of food. Luckily, the problem was caught just in time and on this occasion, no extraction was necessary. A thorough clean remedied the situation and we were able to send home a much happier dog (and owner!) as goodnight kisses were much more enjoyable without the smelly breath!



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