

## Frequently Asked Questions re: Veterinary Dentistry

### How do I know if my pet needs a dental cleaning?

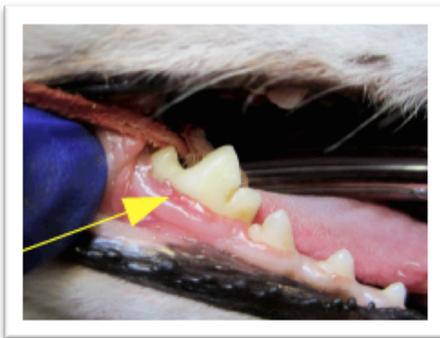
This decision is best made in consultation with one of our veterinarians. They will perform a thorough awake examination to look for signs of calculus build-up, gingivitis, periodontal disease, fractures and tooth resorption (explained below). This allows for us to get a general idea of your pet's oral health condition. The veterinarian will be able to discuss our recommendations for care, and answer any questions you may have. It is important to know that most pets continue to eat and do not always show obvious indications that they are in oral discomfort.

### What happens when my pet gets a professional veterinary dental cleaning?

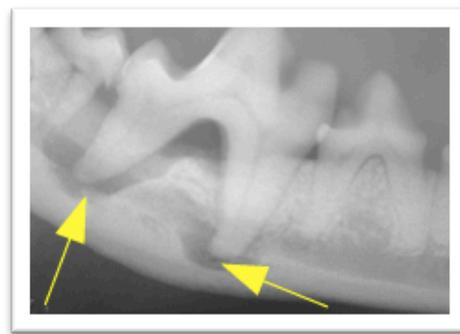
Dental work on pets requires general anesthesia to allow for a comprehensive oral exam, which includes full mouth radiographs. 70% of pathology is found on dental radiographs (see photos below). Just like when you go to the dentist, we measure gingival pocket depths and check for tooth mobility. Based on the information gathered, we decide what treatments are needed to keep your pet comfortable and healthy. All of the teeth are cleaned thoroughly with an ultrasonic scaler that removes all calculus buildup, including under the gum line, without injury to the tissues. We finish with polishing to smooth out the tooth surfaces, which makes it more difficult for plaque and bacteria to adhere to the tooth.

### I get awake dental cleanings done at the pet store and the teeth look great. Isn't this enough?

During an awake dental cleaning, the visible tartar is cleaned off the teeth and the teeth are polished. This may make a pet's teeth look nice, but its effectiveness at addressing dental pathology is somewhere between a good brushing and a hygienist's cleaning. An anesthetic dental procedure is analogous to all visits to your dentist within a year or two – dental radiographs are taken and all problem teeth are identified and treated on the same day. Our pets could never sit still for the thorough cleaning and exam under the gumline that happens at your dental office, nor can they sit still for dental radiographs. The photos below are taken from a routine dental procedure. On the left is a photo taken after cleaning, and on cursory visual exam the teeth look great. On the right, an x-ray image of the same teeth reveals abscesses (pockets of pus) on both roots of the large tooth in the photo. If left untreated this would continue be a constant source of pain and infection for the dog, and lead to more problems in the future. Without a complete exam and radiographs, we never would have known this pet was in pain.



*After cleaning, this tooth appears normal on visual examination.*



*Radiograph of the same tooth.  
Note tooth root abscesses.*

## **What is tooth resorption? How do I know if my pet has tooth resorption?**

Tooth resorption, also known as odontoclastic resorptive lesions, are found in 50% of cats and occasionally in dogs as well. Odontoclasts are normal cells located in the periodontal ligament of teeth. Their usual function is the resorption of the deciduous (baby) tooth roots so that they will fall out to make room for the adult teeth. For reasons unknown, the odontoclasts are activated and cause destruction of the adult tooth root and tooth crown. It is important to understand that although we can visualize tooth resorption in some patients on awake exam, it is most commonly found on dental radiographs. This is due to its action beginning more commonly at the roots. It also hides below heavy calculus buildup on the crowns. Drooling and bleeding are often mentioned by guardians of cats with resorptive lesions, but most cats show no obvious signs. The only treatment is extraction of the affected teeth. Cats are frequently reported to be more active and happier after the procedure!



*Painful resorptive lesion in a cat.*

## **How much will a dental cleaning cost?**

The cost of a dental procedure varies and is primarily based on the time it takes. We use licensed veterinary technicians to monitor our patients using the best equipment on the market. We use the safest induction agents and treat your pet as we would our own. Due to the fact that most pathology is found after the pet is anesthetized, it is often difficult to prepare an exact estimate in advance. We perform all oral surgery required that same day to avoid another anesthetic procedure later.