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## Dental disease in dogs and cats

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DENTAL disease is one of the most commonly diagnosed health problems in pets.

In fact, it affects at least 80 per cent of all dogs and cats over three years of age.

Dental disease is initially caused by plaque (made up of food, saliva and bacteria).

Plaque sticks to the surface of the tooth, and if not removed will calcify or set into tartar.

There are many signs that can be suggestive of dental disease including: Bad breath; Discolouration or crusting on teeth; Red or inflamed gum lines; Reluctance to chew or discomfort associated with eating;

Chewing on only one side of the mouth;

Dropping food, drooling or discharge from the mouth;

Difficulty swallowing;

Pawing or rubbing at the mouth; and/ or weight loss;

The most concerning side effects of dental disease are much less obvious.

Bacteria associated with dental disease can enter the bloodstream lodging in heart valves, kidneys, liver and other organs and can result in organ dysfunction.

There are many ways to help keep your pet's teeth clean and maintain oral health.

Dental diets and supplements - a fully balanced dry food plays an imperative role in your pet's dental health. Chewing dental kibble acts as a natural toothbrush by scraping plaque from teeth.

Ovens and Kiewa Veterinary Hospital

Brushing - daily brushing of teeth with pet toothbrushes or a soft children's toothbrush is best practice for removing plaque. Starting this process from a young age (as a puppy or kitten) is recommended to get your pet used to this procedure. Pet toothpastes are available and human toothpaste should NEVER be used.

Oral treatments - there are several types of gels, water additives and chews designed specifically for pets. These products work to reduce the accumulation of plaque and quantity of bacteria in the mouth. These products are often a much easier alternative to brushing.

Chew toys - safe chew toys can promote chewing action and the production of saliva.

Dental disease can be treated by your veterinarian.

Once tartar has formed, a scale and polish is required to remove it entirely.

This procedure requires general anaesthesia and an ultrasonic scaler to break and remove tartar and calculus.

Depending on the severity of disease, extractions can also be required where teeth are too diseased to salvage.

A clean and healthy mouth is essential to the overall health of our pets.

If you are concerned your cat or dog may be suffering from dental disease, please book in for a dental check with a veterinarian.