

# A guide to your cat's dental procedure



**Dental disease is very common in cats - recent surveys show that it affects more than seven in every ten cats over three years old.**

Dental disease usually begins with a plaque deposit on the teeth (as with humans). This hardens to form tartar, which can be seen as a yellow-brown deposit on the tooth, beginning at the base of the tooth and gradually spreading to cover the entire tooth. As tartar forms it will spread beneath the gum line, allowing bacteria to encroach and causing an infection known as gingivitis.

If the infection travels deeper, into the area called the periodontal membrane (the 'glue' that holds the tooth in its socket) then the infection is termed periodontitis. Gingivitis is reversible, but periodontitis is not and usually requires the removal of the tooth.

## **What are the signs of tooth disease?**

Tartar can be seen quite easily and will often cause foul breath, although it does not cause the animal problems until it develops into painful gingivitis. Cats will then have problems chewing with the affected teeth, leading to a vicious cycle of disease where the affected teeth are not being used to chew, therefore they are not being cleaned and so further tartar builds up.

The gums will bleed easily, and in advanced stages cats will find it impossible to eat and can often dribble constantly.

Cats rarely get rotten teeth (caries) as we do. They may, however, suffer with a condition called a FORL (Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions) where the enamel of the tooth dissolves leaving an exposed painful nerve in the central cavity.

## **How does dental disease affect general health?**

As well as the obvious pain and discomfort associated with dental disease, your cat's immune system is having to constantly fight infection, and over time your cat can become run down. Infections can track into the gums causing painful root abscesses. Also as the cat chews, some bacteria will be released into the blood stream and this can affect the kidneys, heart and liver. Recent surveys in older cats suggest that chronic gum disease can reduce your cat's life-span by up to 2 or 3 years as a result.

Some cats unfortunately have a form of gingivitis called 'lymphocytic / plasmocytic gingivitis', which is unrelated to tartar build up, caused by the body's own inflammatory cells attacking itself. Removal of the tartar will help in these cases but unfortunately it will rarely cure the disease and your cat may need ongoing treatment (either regular courses of antibiotics or regular corticosteroid injections) to control the problem.



## **What will happen during my cat's dental procedure?**

Antibiotics are usually prescribed for a couple of days before the procedure, to allow them to build up in your cat's system. These will then continue for several days afterwards to kill off all the infection in the gums.

On admission, your cat will be given a general anaesthetic to avoid distress. An ultrasonic scaler is used to remove tartar from the teeth and a probe assesses whether gum disease extends down into the periodontal membrane. If periodontitis is present, the tooth will need to be extracted. Most teeth with FORLs also need extraction, as do any that are broken or loose.

Due to the size of their roots, canines and molars may need to be surgically extracted. An incision will be made over the gum, some of the bone drilled away and the tooth extracted 'sideways'. Any stitches will dissolve without the need for later removal.

After your cat's teeth have been scaled they will then be polished to leave a smooth surface, which will slow down the build up of plaque in the future.

## **After the dental procedure.**

Unfortunately cats with dental disease tend to have recurring problems. Our nurses will speak to you about diet and brushing your cat's teeth in order to reduce the chances of her having to have another dental procedure in the near future. If your cat has had extractions then she may need a follow up appointment with the vet or nurse.

## **How much will it cost?**

Giving accurate estimates of costs can be tricky - in most cases your cat will need to be anaesthetised to allow us to probe her teeth to assess whether or not she needs extractions. Costs then will depend on the type and number of extractions needed, as well as the time spent under anaesthetic.

**We are always happy to provide an estimate of costs, please contact your vet or ask at reception.**

- Costs for uncomplicated dental procedures include pre-medication, general anaesthetic scaling and polishing.
- As many cats with dental disease fall into the 'senior' age range we would always advise a blood test before the anaesthetic to rule out any liver or kidney problems, especially as these can be seen more commonly when gum disease is present.

