



Reservoir Veterinary Clinic

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CANINE DENTISTRY

Humans have 32 teeth operating under a bite pressure of about 1/2 ton and the dog has 42 teeth with a bite pressure about **8 times** this! These differences are important when we look at how we make diet and 'home-care' recommendations.

We should feed a '**balanced & complete**' diet to encourage healthy growth and livelihood. The form that this takes is also important, soft or mushy food is not at all good for oral hygiene, foods that encourage chewing are better.

Chewing is a very important part of our pet's oral hygiene: physical rubbing and friction and the spread of protective **saliva** aids in the removal of plaque, which would otherwise develop very quickly. The least obvious but biggest problem occurs below the gum's margin, plaque establishing here will cause inflammation (*gingivitis*) and at this stage the damage is still reversible. However if this condition is allowed to persist, *periodontal disease* will occur, this is not reversible and may progress to loss of the teeth.

In dogs we generally recommend large, raw, meaty bones and more dry food than soft food in their diet.

- The dry foods by **Hill's** called **t/d** and **Oral Care** are specially formulated to ensure more chewing is necessary as part of their consumption.

In the toy dog breeds we may modify our recommendations and suggest trying lightly cooked bones such as lamb shanks. These small breeds are less likely to break these bones into small sharp fragments that might cause problems in the larger breeds.

We never recommend feeding cooked chop bones!

Brushing is a substitute for chewing and may be recommended in those pets that do not chew their food sufficiently well, or eat only soft foods.

Soft brushes are necessary as they cause less discomfort and are more acceptable to the pet.

It needs to be done daily for maximum effect, but less often is acceptable, as it is better than nothing at all!

Toothpaste: Human pastes are not suitable for our pets as they foam, have an unacceptable flavour and are high in salt. Humans do not swallow the paste, our pets will. Pet toothpastes generally contain enzymes and are used in conjunction with brushing to increase effectiveness.

Chlorhexidine (gels or sprays) and the new oral gels such as **Maxigard** are very useful as home care products.

These are easily applied and have very good anti-plaque properties.

Remember that the best intentions will amount to nothing at all if not followed through.

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS:

Gingivitis is the reversible inflammation of the gums (gingiva), whereas

Periodontal disease is the irreversible loss of the structures that support the teeth.

Central components of Periodontitis:

- Caused by *bacteria*
- Invading bacteria produce 'pockets' by disrupting the gingiva & deeper tissues, eventually causing the loss of supporting bone.
- Tends to increase in severity and prevalence with age as more than 80% of dogs have some periodontal disease by 5 years of age!

If a dog is presented with obvious tartar build-up or gingivitis, a thorough dental cleaning and polishing (called a dental prophylaxis) will be recommended as the initial treatment. This procedure takes about 45 minutes and can only be performed under a general anaesthetic. Analgesia in the form of local anaesthesia will be

incorporated as well if there are any painful problems encountered.

It is not possible to fully evaluate the condition of their teeth if they are conscious! An anaesthetic is necessary.

After this, to help prevent further deterioration we will make 'home care' recommendations, but future check-ups are still necessary, especially if the problems are already advanced.

General health problems, or systemic infections (such as heart, liver and urinary problems) are all too frequently seen in dogs with bad teeth.

PREVENTION OF DENTAL DISEASE:

We advise **Hill's t/d** and **Oral Care** foods plus raw meaty bones and/or rawhide chews.

Chew toys can also be used as an adjunct but please do not offer an old slipper or shoe! This will eventually lead to the loss of a shoe that you did not intend to get chewed up.

