

Park Veterinary Centre

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Dental Home Care For Your Cat

Just like people, cats' teeth are prone to the build up of tartar and plaque. The accumulation of plaque causes inflammation of the gums which often leads to erosion of the gums, halitosis or bad breath, tooth root abscesses and eventually destruction of the tooth root. In addition, inflammation and infection causes pain and discomfort to the cat and can cause the mouth to become quite ulcerated. Infection from the mouth can spread around the body and cause potentially life-threatening problems in organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys. Good home care is the most important factor in preventing the development of these conditions and greatly reduces the need for the cat to have his or her teeth treated under general anaesthetic.

Brushing is by far the best way to keep your cat's teeth healthy. The younger the cat when brushing becomes part of the daily routine the better – older cats are often more reluctant to cooperate! Cats do not usually like minty flavours, and cannot spit out the foam produced by toothpastes designed for people so it is important to use a veterinary paste such as *C.E.T.* It comes in malt or poultry flavours and in addition to containing enzymes which help break down plaque, the paste is abrasive on the surface of the tooth. Start off by getting your cat accustomed to the sensation of brushing by gently stroking the cheek over the teeth in small circular movements. Then introduce him or her to the taste of the paste – most cats will lick it directly off your finger! Start brushing the teeth themselves using either a very soft bristled brush or a specially designed plastic finger brush. The most important areas of the teeth – the outside of the canine teeth and the large molars at the back – can all be reached without opening the mouth – just lift up the lip, put your finger or brush inside the cheek and start brushing.

Chew and cleansing solutions can be used in cats that absolutely refuse to allow you to brush their teeth. The *C.E.T. chews* again contain enzymes to help break down plaque. The chews themselves are quite large and your cat may need to be encouraged to eat it by breaking it up into little bits, possibly with some normal food, until he gets the idea that it is really quite tasty and supposed to be eaten! If you are not brushing, then ideally chews should be supplemented with some form of oral cleansing solution such as *CHX*. Another product, *Logic*, is a gel which most cats love the taste of – again it is not a substitute for brushing but it is useful in many situations. The best way to administer it is to put about 2cm of gel on the cat's paw so that he spends 5 or 10 minutes licking it off.

Diet has some influence over development of tartar. Soft food alone is not very good for the teeth. However even dry food does not really help keep the teeth clean. There is one diet available, *Hill's t/d*, which acts more like a chew and is useful in some cases. Fibrous meat such as lamb shin or meat on the bone can be fed once or twice a week to help the cat keep its own teeth clean.

Brushing and other home care should be started at as young an age as possible. If your cat is adult it may be necessary to have the teeth cleaned under anaesthetic, and it is after this procedure that it is particularly important to start a routine at home to keep the teeth healthy.