

THE DENTAL

The clients hope for the “simple dental”. “Just clean’em up Doc” or the dental prophylactic cleaning recommended by dentists for humans every 6 months, even though we brush regularly. A price for that “simple dental” is what is quoted on the phone. The more usual situation, however, is a patient with heavy tartar, gingivitis (gum infection), toothache, foul breath that is 7-8 years old or more. A simple dental is not sufficient.

Upon initial inspection on the exam table we can recommend routine cleaning or a more in-depth procedure. The full extent of the problems cannot be fully realized until the patient is under anesthesia and each tooth can be inspected. We need the client to be available by phone so we can update the estimates and have approval granted for any necessary additional treatment.

Dental disease in animals as in people affects health in general. Bacterial infections can spread to the heart, kidney, liver and lungs. Most non-brushing patients need a basic cleaning by 3 years of age.

A. Routine Dental Cleaning includes:

1. Anesthesia- In small patients, we use gas only. Large dogs are given an injection IV and then put on gas anesthesia. Gas is very safe and allows quick recovery.
2. Dental Prophy-Tartar is removed; plaque is scraped and flushed from under the gum line, teeth are polished smooth, and a fluoride treatment is applied for 5 minutes then rinsed.
3. Minor problems of pockets along roots of teeth and gum infections are treated with antibiotics.

B. Possible Additional Procedures:

1. Pre-op blood work to be as safe as possible. Makes sure liver and kidneys are happy.
2. IV fluids in older patients, 10 years or more, to maintain blood pressure and kidney function.

C. Complicated Procedures:

With more serious problems, we may need to take corrective measures so the mouth can heal. Deeper pockets, major gingivitis (infections) which cause gums to recede and expose the roots and even bone loss. We need to flush and clean these pockets extremely well. Sometimes we need to cut the gums back. If 50% of the root is exposed in multi-rooted teeth, the arch is exposed, and the owner is unable to brush daily, it is better to remove the tooth. When teeth are loose (barely movable) some can be saved with antibiotics and brushing. Wobbling teeth are not savable so we extract them. In an attempt to save teeth with deep pockets, the pockets are filled with antibiotic paste and oral antibiotics are sent home. These patients need more frequent cleanings (every 6 months) and antibiotics every 3 months until the gums are healthy. If this is not done, the infection progresses and the teeth are lost.

D. Disaster Dentals:

1. Horrible “green tartar teeth” and bad mouth odor. The patient may not be eating hard food or may be drooling. We may remove multiple teeth, look for tumors, or have to do gum surgery to close holes or even repair a broken jaw. Cats may have an autoimmune problem that requires removal of all teeth to make the mouth painless.

Veterinary Pet Health Insurance, VPI, has an illness and accident policy with a rider that allows yearly cleaning and check ups.

