

Cats, Nutrition, and Periodontal Disease

My veterinarian spends lots of time talking to me about my cat's teeth. What do I need to know about periodontal disease and my cat?



Periodontal disease is the most common problem affecting cats of all age groups. Diseases that affect the gums can cause pain and infection, in addition to causing the teeth to fall out. Periodontal disease can also have a secondary effect on major organs, causing or exacerbating organ system diseases. The best way to

prevent periodontal disease is daily dental home care. This often includes an effective, evidence-based dental food to provide plaque control.

["The very best way to prevent periodontal disease is daily dental home care"](#)

There are a few key steps to promote oral health in cats:

1. Reduce and control plaque. Plaque is the root cause of periodontal disease in cats.
2. Match plaque control techniques to the needs of the individual cat.
3. Feed a diet with an appropriate texture to contribute to oral health.
4. Stay ahead of plaque accumulation and schedule professional periodontal therapy as recommended by your veterinarian.

The importance of daily dental home care cannot be overemphasized. If you are having trouble with dental home care, your veterinary health care team is ready to help. They can show you how to remove plaque by using

a toothbrush or a piece of surgical gauze wrapped around your finger. Do not use human toothpaste to brush your cat's teeth at home; instead, use toothpaste specifically formulated for cats and dogs.

Eating lots of sugar is associated with dental disease in humans. Is sugar an issue for my cat's oral health?

Studies have shown that sugars (soluble carbohydrates) do not contribute to plaque accumulation in cats.

If sugars are not an issue for cats and dental disease, what factors (aside from dental home care) contribute to feline dental disease? What is nutritionally best for my cat's mouth and teeth?

Risk factors that contribute to periodontal disease in cats include:

1. Breed- Purebred cats have a higher incidence of periodontal disease.
2. Age- The older the cat, the longer dental disease has to accumulate.
3. Immune system health- A healthy immune system contributes to a healthy mouth.

Nutrition can prevent periodontal disease and gingivitis. The food's texture and make-up can affect the environment of the mouth. It can help maintain tissue integrity, stimulate saliva production, alter plaque bacteria metabolism, and provide mechanical cleansing of tooth surfaces. Historically, veterinarians have recommended feeding dry cat food to prevent periodontal disease in cats. However, clinical studies have shown that dry food alone does not contribute to improved oral health. Therefore, it is important to select a diet that has been developed to enhance oral health.

How do I know if the food I am choosing for my cat will actually contribute to oral health?

Your veterinarian can make a specific recommendation for a diet that will enhance feline oral health. You can also look for a dental support diet that has been approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC).

The VOHC was established in 1997 in order to provide an independent and objective means of evaluating and recognizing products developed to interfere with plaque accumulation. It evaluates data generated in clinical studies, which must be performed using VOHC-approved protocols. In addition, the VOHC has two levels of award- plaque control and tartar control. Plaque is the primary cause of periodontal disease, so look for the VOHC seal that specifies plaque control. It is important to use these nutritional products in a way that achieves optimal performance, which generally means daily use for every meal. "Diluting" the food by mixing it with another product will reduce its efficacy and prevent it from maximally enhancing your cat's oral health.

Dental food kibbles are built differently from conventional kibbles. These kibbles are bigger, forcing the cat to actually chew them instead of swallowing them whole. These larger kibbles scrape plaque from the tooth as the cat bites through them.

How can I find out what feline diets have earned the VOHC seal for plaque control?

A complete list of all products (not just food) that have been awarded the VOHC seal is available at www.vohc.org.

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