



Poor dental hygiene can be a source of pain and discomfort for many pets.

Sometimes owners are unaware of their pet's discomfort because most animals will not cry out in the presence of such pain – they just tolerate it.

If there is infection in the mouth it can allow bacteria into the body via the blood stream and cause infections elsewhere. Kidney, heart, lung and liver infections can all be caused by poor oral health. Bad teeth can therefore just be the 'tip of the iceberg'.

### Signs of Dental Problems in Dogs and Cats.

#### Bad breath

Halitosis (bad breath) is caused by bacteria in the mouth.

#### Increased drooling

Pets with gum disease such as tartar and gingivitis, or dental problems such as a bad or fractured tooth will drool excessively.

#### The build-up of yellowish brown plaque like deposits and tartar on the teeth

Tartar is the hard brown accumulation which occurs on teeth. It is caused by mineralisation of plaque which in turn is caused by bacterial action against food particles in the mouth. The presence of tartar leads to gingivitis (gum inflammation).

#### Red, swollen or bleeding gums

The gums become red, sore and prone to bleeding when touched.

Chronic tartar and gingivitis will eventually lead to periodontal disease - in this condition the inflammation causes infection and destruction of the tissue around the tooth. Affected teeth loosen and may eventually fall out.

#### Reluctance or difficulty in eating, from having pain on chewing food, along with subsequent weight loss

If the disease is severe, affected animals may eat on one side of their mouth, lose weight or generally fail to thrive. Older cats especially may start to look rather tatty as they may start to groom themselves less enthusiastically.



**IMPORTANT - When dental disease is suspected the animal should be examined by a vet.**

A veterinary dental examination will involve a thorough assessment of the mouth and also a general health examination. The patient's general health will be assessed to make sure that there are no consequences secondary to the dental disease elsewhere in the body, and also to ensure that the patient is well enough for a general anaesthetic, should dental treatment be advised.

The vet will look for tartar and gingivitis. Should this have progressed, periodontal disease may be present, along with gingival recession - where the gum shrinks back from its normal position due to infection.

Some tooth fractures are obvious because a piece of tooth is missing, but in other instances they may be very fine and subtle. Any fractures which extend into the pulp cavity (where the nerve is) will cause pain and eventually tooth-root abscesses.

Many dogs have worn teeth due to chewing - these patients need to be carefully assessed as, whilst such teeth may cause no problems, they may be a source of significant pain in some individuals.

Younger pets need to be assessed also. Sometimes temporary ('milk') teeth do not fall out at the correct time and so can cause problems for the adult teeth as they come through. In addition, malocclusion - a condition in which the teeth or jaws are not perfectly aligned - is quite common. Generally, malocclusion is just a cosmetic problem, but if the teeth dig into the gum or hard palate it can cause pain and infections.

**Call us if you have any concerns and wish to book a 'Dental Assessment'.**