

Dental Disease in Dogs and Cats

Why dental disease matters

Dental disease is *very common* in both dogs and cats. Over time, bacteria build up in the mouth and can harm not only the teeth and gums, but also affect overall health.

Ensuring good oral care helps your pet live more comfortably and reduces the risk of more serious complications.

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease refers to the infection and inflammation of the tissues around the teeth (gums, ligaments, bone) caused by plaque and tartar buildup.

It typically progresses from mild gingivitis (gum inflammation) to more severe periodontitis (loss of tooth support).

The stages of periodontal disease

Veterinarians usually classify the condition in **four stages** — from early and reversible to advanced and severe. Here's a breakdown:

Stage	What's going on	What you might see or notice
Stage 1 – Gingivitis	Inflammation of the gums only; no bone or attachment loss yet.	Gums may look red or swollen at the gum line; bad breath; plaque begins to build.
Stage 2 – Early Periodontitis	Some loss of attachment (up to ~25%); early bone changes may be visible on X-rays.	More tartar, gums may recede slightly, perhaps mild gum pocketing, your pet might show less enthusiasm for chew toys.
Stage 3 – Moderate Periodontitis	Significant loss of support (approx. 25-50%); deeper pockets; bone loss more noticeable.	Loose teeth, receding gums, pus or infection, pain eating, marked bad breath.

**Stage 4 –
Advanced
Periodontitis**

More than ~50% attachment loss; severe damage, very likely tooth loss; the prognosis is guarded.

Very loose or missing teeth, exposed roots, severe gum recession, possible jaw bone infection, difficulty eating or avoidance of chew toys, systemic effects (e.g., weight loss, lethargy).

Signs you might notice at home

Even before things get very advanced, watch for:

- Bad breath (halitosis)
 - Gums that look red, swollen, bleed when touched or when chewing
 - Yellow-brown tartar build-up on the teeth
 - Difficulty eating, dropping food, favoring one side
 - Loose teeth, or missing teeth
 - Pawing at the mouth or face or avoiding chew toys
- If you notice any of these, it's a good time to bring your pet to the clinic for an examination.
-

Why you shouldn't ignore dental disease

Dental disease isn't just a "bad breath" issue. As it progresses:

- It causes **pain** and discomfort for your pet (they may eat less or avoid chew toys)
 - It can lead to **tooth loss** and more expensive treatment down the road
 - Bacteria from the mouth can **enter the bloodstream** and affect other organs such as the heart, kidneys or liver.
 - Early stages are **more easily treatable**; advanced stages may require extractions or aggressive surgery with a more guarded outcome.
-

How your veterinarian will help

At your clinic, the process typically includes:

1. A full oral exam (ideally under anesthesia) plus dental X-rays to check under the gumline.
 2. A professional dental cleaning: scaling to remove plaque and calculus above and below the gumline, polishing, maybe extractions if needed.
 3. A treatment plan based on the stage of disease (from simple cleaning plus home care for early stages, to extraction or surgery in advanced cases).
 4. A home-care plan: brushing at home, dental diets or chews, regular monitoring. Because once the disease is present, **strict home care** is essential for success.
-

What you can do at home to help

- **Brush your pet's teeth** daily if possible (use pet-safe toothpaste and a small brush or finger toothbrush).
 - Provide **dental-specific diets, treats or chew toys** designed to reduce tartar.
 - Regularly check your pet's mouth (lift lips, look for red/swollen gums, tartar, odd smell or behavior).
 - Bring your pet for **routine dental check-ups** — we often recommend at least once a year, but some pets (especially older or small breeds) may need more frequent monitoring.
 - Make dental care fun: reward your pet after brushing, keep training positive, and start slowly if they aren't used to it.
-

When to call us sooner

Contact us promptly if your pet has:

- Loose or missing teeth

- Refuses to eat, drops food, or seems uncomfortable chewing
- Pus or swelling around the mouth or under the jaw
- Persistent bad breath that doesn't improve
- Any sudden change in behaviour (less playful, hides, sleeps more)

These may indicate the disease has moved into the moderate or advanced stage and needs timely intervention.

Dental disease in dogs and cats is extremely common, but the good news is it's largely **preventable** and **treatable**—especially when caught early. With regular professional care and consistent home dental hygiene, pets can enjoy healthy mouths and happy lives.

If you'd like, we can help review your pet's risk (based on breed, age, current dental condition) and set up a tailored plan for home care + professional monitoring.

Feel free to reach out to schedule your pet's dental exam or ask questions about the right tools and routines for home dental care.

Periodontal Disease in Dogs and Cats

Stage 1 – Gingivitis

Margin of attached gingival (gum) is inflamed and swollen.

Plaque covering teeth.

Treatment can reverse condition.



Stage 2 – Early Periodontitis

Entire attached gum is inflamed and swollen.

Mouth is painful and odour begins to be noticeable.

Professional treatment and home dental care can prevent this from becoming irreversible.



Stage 3 – Moderate Periodontitis

Cherry red and bleeding attached gum is being destroyed by infection and calculus (tartar). Sore mouth affects eating and behaviour.

Bad breath is present.

Beginning of periodontal disease.

May be irreversible.



Stage 4 – Advanced Periodontitis

Chronic bacterial infection is destroying the gum, tooth and bone.

Bacteria may be spreading throughout the entire body via the bloodstream and may damage the kidneys, liver and heart.

