

What to Expect During Your Pet's Dental Procedure

Just like people, pets need regular dental care to keep their teeth and gums healthy. If your veterinarian has recommended a **dental cleaning or dental procedure** for your dog or cat, you may be wondering what actually happens during the process.

Here's what to expect — and why professional dental care is one of the best things you can do for your pet's health and comfort.

Why Dental Procedures Are Important

Dental disease (also called **periodontal disease**) is one of the most common health issues seen in pets. It causes bad breath, pain, and infection — and if left untreated, bacteria in the mouth can even affect the heart, liver, and kidneys.

Regular dental cleanings allow your veterinarian to:

- Remove **plaque and tartar** buildup
 - Check for **tooth resorption, broken teeth, or gum disease**
 - Take **dental X-rays** to see below the gumline
 - Treat or extract any painful or diseased teeth
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Step-by-Step: What Happens During a Veterinary Dental Procedure

1. Pre-Anesthetic Evaluation

Before any dental procedure, your veterinarian will perform a **thorough physical exam** and may recommend **bloodwork** or other tests.

This helps ensure your pet is healthy enough for anesthesia and allows the team to choose the safest medications and monitoring plan.

2. Anesthesia and Monitoring

Dental procedures in pets require **general anesthesia**. This is necessary because:

- Pets won't stay still for a full cleaning or X-rays
- Many steps (like scaling under the gums) can be uncomfortable
- It keeps your pet **safe, calm, and pain-free**

During anesthesia, your pet is continuously monitored by trained staff using advanced equipment to track:

- Heart rate and ECG
- Breathing, carbon dioxide and oxygen levels
- Blood pressure
- Body temperature

This close monitoring helps ensure your pet's safety throughout the procedure.

3. Dental X-Rays

Once your pet is under anesthesia, your veterinary team will take **digital dental radiographs (X-rays)**.

These images are vital — they show what's happening **below the gumline**, where most dental disease occurs. Many painful conditions, like tooth root abscesses or resorptive lesions, can only be found this way.

4. Cleaning and Scaling

Next, your veterinarian or technician will remove plaque and tartar using both **ultrasonic and hand scaling tools**, cleaning the teeth above and below the gumline.

After scaling, the teeth are **polished** to smooth the enamel surface and slow future plaque buildup.

5. Dental Examination and Charting

Each tooth is carefully examined for:

- Gum recession
- Mobility or fractures

- Resorptive lesions (especially in cats)
- Pockets or bone loss

Findings are recorded in your pet's **dental chart**, creating a detailed record for future care.

6. Treatment of Problem Teeth

If any teeth are loose, fractured, or severely diseased, your veterinarian will discuss **treatment options** — most often **tooth extraction** to relieve pain and prevent infection.

Local nerve blocks (a type of dental anesthesia) and pain medication are used to keep your pet completely comfortable during and after the procedure.

7. Recovery and Home Care

After the procedure, your pet will be moved to a warm, quiet recovery area and **closely monitored** as they wake up from anesthesia.

Your veterinarian will send you home with:

- **Pain medication** or antibiotics if needed
- **Feeding instructions** (soft food for a few days if extractions were done)
- **Tips for ongoing dental care**, such as brushing, dental diets, or approved dental chews

Your pet may be sleepy the evening of the procedure but should be back to their normal self within a day or two.

Aftercare and Long-Term Dental Health

Keeping your pet's mouth healthy doesn't stop after the dental cleaning!

Here are a few ways to maintain those bright, healthy teeth between professional cleanings:

- **Brush your pet's teeth daily** with pet-safe toothpaste
- Use **dental chews or treats** approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC)
- Feed a **dental care diet** if recommended

- Schedule **regular veterinary dental check-ups** — often annually or semi-annually for older pets

A professional veterinary dental procedure is much more than just a “teeth cleaning.”

It’s a **complete oral health assessment** under anesthesia that allows your veterinarian to find and treat painful problems you can’t see at home.

Most importantly, it helps your pet live longer, more comfortably, and free from dental pain.