

## *Northern Illinois Cat Clinic*

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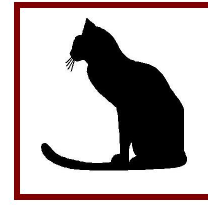
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## ***DENTAL HOME CARE***

With your own teeth, what your dentist and hygienist do is only a small, though essential part of your oral hygiene program. YOU are responsible for the daily brushing and flossing that are required to slow the constant progression of periodontal disease. The same is true for your cat. You are responsible for every aspect of your cat's daily care and the health of his or her mouth becomes more important as we expect our pets to live longer and more comfortable lives.

Brushing your cat's teeth is the main component of home care. The purpose of this is to remove plaque before it becomes tartar. Plaque is the coating on the teeth that includes bacteria, saliva and food particles that adheres to the teeth and the pocket of space between the tooth and the gum. Left in place, plaque rapidly collects minerals from the saliva to form the rock-like brown deposits known as tartar or calculus. By brushing daily, you remove the plaque so the tartar builds up more slowly. As with all things, the better you and your cat are at brushing daily, the better results you will get.

### **EXAMINING THE TEETH**

The first step is to have your veterinarian perform a physical exam; this includes an oral exam to determine what level of dental disease is present. You certainly would not want to start brushing your cat's teeth if there are sore gums or teeth as that would be a very unpleasant experience for him or her. At this point if dental work is needed, that should be the next thing to be scheduled.

### **ANESTHESIA**

The only proper and humane way to carry out a dental cleaning on your cat is to anesthetize him or her. The thought of anesthesia may be worrisome to some people. These days, with modern anesthesia techniques, you have very little to worry about. A recent study involving tens of thousands of cats showed that for every 1000 deaths that occurred during or after a surgery, only one or so could be attributed to anesthesia according to Dr. Lysa Posner, DVM, an anesthesiologist at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. This admirable safety record can be attributed to two things. First, the increased amount of research into anesthetic agents and the wide variety now available allow each cat to have the anesthesia tailored to his or her specific health needs, age and the procedure itself. Secondly, anesthesia monitoring for a cat is now like it is for you; there is an IV (intravenous) catheter with fluids to help maintain blood pressure, blood pressure monitors, oxygen, breathing, and heart rate monitors and, of course a technician to monitor also. This does not mean that there is *no* risk at all with anesthesia, there is not yet a way to make anesthesia completely safe for your cat, your dog or even for you. In the vast majority of cases, though, ignoring dental disease is much riskier than anesthesia.

### **PROFESSIONAL CLEANING**

A dental cleaning involves a thorough cleaning both above and below the gum line with an ultrasonic scaler and other specialized equipment exactly like your dentist and hygienist use on you. Dental radiographs (x-rays) are also taken to look for damaged and diseased teeth. If there are diseased teeth, a decision will be made as to which can be saved by more extensive work or if they have to be removed. At the end of all procedures, the teeth are polished to smooth rough surfaces. In the cat, as in humans and other animals, genetic factors influence how well their immune system controls the bacteria that cause periodontal disease. Some cats have great resistance and do fine with professional cleanings annually,

others may need to have cleanings twice a year. Of course, their diet, overall health and how much home care you provide also play a role here.

## HOME CARE

Now that the teeth are clean and healthy, it's up to you to convince your cat that daily tooth brushing is an enjoyable activity! Of, course, if kitty had teeth removed or is still sore from other dental procedures, don't start brushing until your veterinarian says its o.k. to start. The guidelines below are not hard and fast rules. Each animal is different. If you are starting with your 8 week old kitten this may go fast and be very easy. An older cat, especially one that may have had a sore mouth for a long time, may take weeks of training to get comfortable. Go at your own cat's pace and be patient. Keep your training sessions short and frequent rather than one long one.

- 1) Start by choosing a place like a counter top, that you will use consistently for this activity. Try to always do this about the same time of day. Make sure there are yummy treats nearby. Then begin working with and around your cat's mouth. Use your finger to gently rub the chin, the lips, and the muzzle. Then give a small treat. Lift the lips a bit with your finger. Give a treat. As soon as he or she is comfortable with this step move onto step 2.
- 2) Begin to gently slip your finger in to rub the outside of the teeth for short periods of time before returning to just rubbing the lips, chin, etc. Slowly lengthen the time you are rubbing the teeth. Don't forget to give treats!
- 3) Now its time to introduce some toothpaste (as recommended by your veterinarian, do NOT use human toothpaste or baking soda) onto your finger while doing the rubbing. If this is going well you can wrap some gauze around your finger to provide a rough surface to rub the toothpaste on the teeth.
- 4) If possible, its now time to try a toothbrush with the toothpaste. There are a variety of cat-sized toothbrushes available. Gently brushing from the gumline down with the toothbrush slightly angled ( 45 degrees) is best. Some people find the gauze on the finger best; others are able to move onto a toothbrush. Whichever you find your cat accepts is the best to use.
- 5) Remember to go slowly, at a pace the cat accepts and to use treats to reward your cat for sitting for this activity.
- 6) Your veterinarian may also recommend special dental diets to be used as treats or a primary diet depending on your individual cat's health issues. There are also specialized treats, like C.E.T. chews, that if given daily will help reduce daily plaque build-up. Medicated mouth rinses are also sometimes used in cats that have periodontal disease to further reduce bacterial build-up.
- 7) To see this in real life, log onto the internet and go to:  
[www.felinevideos.vet.cornell.edu/index.shtml](http://www.felinevideos.vet.cornell.edu/index.shtml)

Please feel free to call the office with any questions or problems. Our technicians are here to help you!