



**Cat Hospital of Wichita**

## **Cats have Teeth Too!**

Imagine how your teeth would look and feel if you didn't brush them daily. The same applies to your cat's teeth. Unless you are regularly providing some form of dental care, you are neglecting an important factor in the overall health of your cat.

Periodontal (gum) disease is one of the most common conditions seen by veterinarians today. The problem begins when plaque and tartar are allowed to build up on your cat's teeth. Plaque harbors the bacteria which can infect gum tissue and the roots of teeth resulting in disease and tooth loss. Besides the negative impact on the oral cavity, bacteria can enter the bloodstream through the large network of blood vessels located near the gums and teeth. Recent studies have documented that certain heart, liver and kidney diseases may be associated with these bacteria.

### **Caring for your Cat's Teeth**

The first step in promoting oral health is to contact your veterinarian for a thorough oral examination. At this time, it may be necessary to have your pet's teeth cleaned above and below the gum line. Like people, animals need this professional attention on a routine basis. This cleaning will require your pet to be put under anesthesia. Recent advancements in anesthetic techniques and materials have greatly reduced the risks previously associated with this procedure. However, if you have any concerns regarding anesthesia, please discuss them with your veterinarian.

### **Home Care**

Since tooth brushing is considered the most effective method of removing plaque, most veterinarians recommend an oral hygiene program which includes brushing your cat's teeth. It is important to use a toothbrush and toothpaste designed for cats. Cat toothbrushes are ultra-soft and shaped to fit your cat's mouth and teeth. Cat toothpastes have flavors that appeal to cats and need not be rinsed. **Do not use human toothpaste or baking soda.** These products often contain ingredients which should not be swallowed.

When brushing is not practical, veterinarians may recommend an antibacterial oral rinse or gel for some cats. These products are formulated specifically for cats, and with daily use, they can help slow accumulation of dental plaque.

## **Diet**

Diet can be a major factor in the development of plaque and tartar. Soft or sticky foods may contribute to plaque build-up and subsequent periodontal disease. Dry food and newly-formulated abrasive diets can be helpful in removing plaque above the gum line. In addition, specially treated abrasive dental chews are available for cats. Providing your pet with these abrasive, resilient dental chews is often a good alternative for those days when you do not brush. However, only tooth brushing can remove plaque and food debris *below the gum line*. It is below the gum line where disease-causing bacteria flourish, resulting in irritation, inflammation and infection.

## **Home Care Instructions**

Brushing your cat's teeth is easy and doesn't take much time. The first step is to select a convenient time when you and your pet are both relaxed. For the first few days, simply hold your cat as you normally do when petting her. Gently stroke the outside of your cat's cheeks with your finger for a minute or two. After each session, reward your cat with an appropriate treat and lots of praise. For the next few days – after your cat has become comfortable with this activity – place a small amount of animal dentifrice on your finger and let your pet sample the flavor. Cats like the taste of the dentifrice and will soon consider it a treat. Next, introduce your cat to an animal toothbrush or finger brush. Place a small amount of dentifrice on the brush. Gently raise your cat's upper lip and place the brush against an upper tooth. With a slow circular motion, gently brush only that tooth and the adjoining gum line. Each day gradually increase the number of teeth brushed, but go slowly. Do not go beyond your cat's point of comfort. Build up to approximately 30 seconds of brushing per side. And remember, after each session, reward your cat with a treat and lots of praise. If you are having any problems brushing your cat's teeth, contact your veterinarian.

## **Important**

Be patient, proceed slowly and gently. Use plenty of petting and praise. Soon, both you and your cat will look forward to the time you spend together during this important health care procedure.