



## DENTAL DISEASE IN CATS

As with humans and other animals, most cats will develop dental disease; even young cats can have problems with their gums and teeth. Most problems will go undetected- it is unusual for a cat to tolerate leaving their mouth open long enough for their owner to have a really good look! This job is best left to the vet at your cat's annual health check.

Dental disease can vary from mild dental plaque with no gingivitis, to moderate calculus (this is a plaque build-up which has calcified and hardened), to severe periodontal disease (affecting the bone around the tooth) and gum disease. Unlike other animals, cats can also get a potentially serious tooth condition in which holes can form at the gumline, leading to pain and tooth erosion. The correct name for these is 'feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions', but they are more commonly known as 'neck' or 'ring' lesions. These holes may be visible, but are sometimes located underneath the gum and may only be detectable during a dental procedure.

Another important factor to keep in mind is that when dental disease is present, this can lead to bacteria from the mouth entering the blood stream and causing infection and disease in other areas of the body, for example the kidneys, the heart or the joints.

There are a number of factors involved in the formation and progression of dental disease, but the most common one is diet. It is important to provide food to help brush your cat's teeth- either a specially designed 'dental' dry food, and/or raw chicken wings/necks (under supervision), or chunks of raw meat (but not 'pet meats'!) to chew on a few times a week.

There are some infections that have been implicated in dental disease, including Feline Calicivirus (one of the 'flu' viruses) and FIV, and the vet's assessment will take these into account.

Other steps you can take to care for your cat's teeth include brushing them with a specially designed finger brush or toothbrush with pet toothpaste (not human toothpaste), or the application of a veterinary mouth gel.

Most cats will need to have dental work on their teeth at least once in their lifetime. This is performed during a general anaesthetic and includes scaling the teeth to remove any build up, probing the teeth to check for any holes in the enamel and polishing the teeth to smooth the surface and delay future plaque build up. Sometimes teeth have severe infection or 'ring lesions' and can't be saved so need to be removed, and this is done at the same time. Cats are routinely given a course of antibiotics after a dental to treat the bacterial infection that accompanies dental disease. Some cats will need to have dental work on a regular basis.