

## **KEEPING PETS KISSABLY FRESH**

Is your pet's breath keeping you at paw's length? Does Fido have wince-causing, conversation-pausing, head-turning, stomach churning odor that makes smooching him a scary proposition? If you answered yes, don't despair. February is National Pet Dental Health Month, a great time to talk with your veterinarian about your pet's dental health! Your veterinarian can help your pet be kissably fresh again!

Oral disease is the most common health problem for pets. By the age of 3, approximately 80% of dogs and 75% of cats have developed periodontal disease. Left unchecked, it merely gets worse with age. The infection can lead to tooth decay or tooth loss and can even spread through the bloodstream causing kidney, liver, lung and heart problems. However, it is easily treatable and can be prevented by following a program of regular veterinary dental exams and a home dental care routine.

Oral disease begins when plaque- a soft film containing bacteria-forms on your pet's teeth. If not removed, the plaque will harden into tartar. This tartar builds up below the gumline, causing inflammation of the gum tissue (gingivitis) and the lining of the tooth socket (periodontitis). Without treatment, your pet's teeth can loosen or fall out, and the bacteria can spread to other parts of the body and cause serious health problems.

Preventing oral disease can help your pet live a healthier, happier life. Do not feed your pet table scraps-this can increase the formation of plaque and tartar. Dry, crunchy pet food can help clean plaque from the teeth. Ask your veterinarian about specialty food designed specifically to reduce plaque and tartar. Train your pet to accept regular brushings at home. Specially designed pet tooth brushes and toothpastes are available. A dental exam should be part of your pet's regular health check-up. Dental problems can be prevented or treated with regular cleaning and scaling done by a veterinarian. Under general anesthesia, plaque and tartar can be removed from the teeth and also from below the gum line where bacteria can hide. Teeth can also be treated with fluoride and a sealant which helps strengthen the teeth and prevent the formation of new plaque and tartar.

Maintaining a pet's oral health is important. Simple preventative treatment can keep serious dental disease from occurring. With routine dental care, you can go back to kissable kitties and smoochable pooches.