

Periodontal Disease in Cats

- More than 85% of cats over 4 years of age have periodontal disease.
- Periodontal disease is a progressive inflammation of the supporting structures around the teeth.
- Signs of periodontal disease include bad breath, redness or bleeding along the gum line, drooling, difficulty chewing, and loose or missing teeth.
- Periodontal disease is diagnosed by examining the teeth and supporting structures while the pet is under anesthesia.
- Gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) can be reversed with a thorough dental cleaning and polishing.
- Loss of tooth attachment, or bone loss, cannot be reversed.
- Treatment of periodontal disease may include antibiotics and other dental procedures, including tooth extraction.
- Regular, at-home dental care, with periodic veterinary dental cleanings, is the best way to prevent periodontal disease and keep your cat's mouth healthy.

What Is Periodontal Disease?

More than 85% of cats over 4 years of age have evidence of periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is a progressive inflammation of the supporting structures surrounding the teeth and is the main cause of early tooth loss.

What Causes Periodontal Disease?

Periodontal disease starts when bacteria form plaque on the teeth. Within days, minerals in the saliva bond with plaque to form *tartar*, a hard substance that adheres to the teeth. The bacteria work their way under the gums and cause *gingivitis*, which is an inflammation of the gums. Once under the gums, bacteria destroy the supporting tissue around the tooth, leading to tooth loss. Inflammation of the bone and tooth support structures is referred to as *periodontitis*. The combination of gingivitis and periodontitis is known as *periodontal disease*. Bacteria associated with dental disease can travel in the bloodstream to infect the heart, kidneys, and liver.

What Are the Signs of Periodontal Disease?

The signs of periodontal disease include:

- Bad breath
- Redness or bleeding along the gum line
- Drooling, which may be tinged with blood
- Difficulty chewing
- Pawing at the mouth
- Loose or missing teeth
- Facial swelling
- Nasal discharge
- Gum recession

How Is Periodontal Disease Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian can see signs of gingivitis and tartar buildup by examining your cat's mouth. However, since most periodontal disease occurs beneath the gum line, the only way to truly assess your cat's mouth is to perform an examination while your pet is under anesthesia. Your veterinarian can use a dental probe to measure any loss of attachment around each tooth and take dental radiographs (x-rays) to assess for bone loss, abscesses, and other problems.

Regular, at-home dental care, with periodic veterinary dental cleanings, is the best way to prevent periodontal disease and keep your cat's mouth healthy.

How Is Periodontal Disease Treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of the disease. If your cat has mild periodontal disease, consisting of gingivitis without any bone loss, a thorough dental cleaning that includes the area beneath the gums, followed by dental polishing, can help reverse the problem.

If there has been a loss of the supporting structures around the teeth, however, this cannot be reversed.

Common Conditions

Your veterinarian may need to apply antibiotics beneath the gums and perform dental procedures, which may include tooth extraction.

How Can I Keep My Cat From Getting Periodontal Disease?

An important way to prevent dental disease is regular home dental care. Daily brushing can help remove plaque before it turns into tartar. You can use a child's toothbrush or purchase a finger brush from your veterinarian. Human toothpastes should be avoided because they contain substances that pets shouldn't swallow in large quantities. Pet toothpaste is available

in flavors such as chicken, seafood, and malt. If your cat won't permit brushing, there are mouth rinse solutions (mouthwash for pets) that target plaque bacteria and help promote healthier teeth and gums.

There are several dental diets and treats that can also help keep plaque and tartar to a minimum. These diets tend to have larger kibbles to provide abrasive action against the tooth surface when chewed, or they may include ingredients to prevent tartar mineralization. Ask your veterinarian which dental diets or treats are best for your cat, and don't forget to keep scheduled appointments for follow-up dental checkups.