



Elk Rapids Animal Hospital

Phone: (231) 264-6700 ~ Fax: (231) 264-0400
714 US 31 S. ~ Elk Rapids, MI 49629

ENCOURAGING GOOD ORAL HYGEINE

Why Dental Care?

Dental disease causes bad breath, tooth pain and can lead to tooth loss, but it doesn't just affect their teeth. When dogs and cats have plaque and tartar they also have bacteria on their teeth. That leads to gingivitis, tooth root abscesses and other infections. Bacteria from those teeth can spread and cause damage to virtually all of their organs including the kidneys and heart.

What Can We Do Here?

Once the plaque and tartar has built up we recommend a dental prophylaxis (preventative cleaning). This involves general anesthesia because our patients will not voluntarily keep their mouths open for the 30 minutes or so that it takes to properly clean all the surfaces of their teeth. We use an ultrasonic scaler to remove all the plaque and tartar. This creates tiny grooves that attract plaque so it is important that we also polish the teeth with a paste in order to smooth out these grooves. We also can apply a sealant (OraVet), which can provide a protective layer to help prevent future dental disease. During this cleaning we also examine each tooth and the surrounding gingival to locate any problems. If a tooth is broken or loose or if there is significant gingival disease we may recommend further treatment including extraction.

What Can The Owner Do At Home?

If we do the OraVet, the owner can follow up with the home care kit. They can re-apply what is worn away with time and provide longer protection. The number one way to prevent dental disease is brushing. We sell brushes and toothpaste that are appropriate for pets (human toothpaste has fluoride which is not safe if swallowed). If the owner starts slow, just using their finger, most dogs and some cats will get used to it and may even enjoy it. If brushing is not possible there are approved diets (Science diet t/d or Oral Care) and treats (CET chews) which can help prevent plaque and tartar build up. Some pets rebuild tartar very quickly after a dental cleaning despite good home care. For these patients we may recommend "pulse" antibiotic therapy.

Why Do Our Patients Still Have Dental Disease?

There are a lot of misconceptions that lead people to ignore these recommendations. Many think anesthesia is too risky. We use some of the safest anesthesia methods available. In an otherwise healthy pet, anesthesia risks are minimal. The risk of bacterial infection secondary to dental disease on the other hand is significant. Many think their dogs won't let them brush their teeth, the truth is most people just won't take the time. If people don't have time the diets and chews provide an alternative.