

The Oral Health Procedure

An Oral Health Procedure is performed not only to clean the teeth, but also to evaluate the oral cavity for any other problems that might be present. In the past, this procedure was called a “dental cleaning.” This term does not adequately describe all of the steps that are taken to treat and prevent pain & infection in your pet’s mouth. Below is a description of the 8 steps that we perform for every Oral Health Procedure.

Step 1.Supragingival cleaning: The tartar & plaque that is visible above the gumline is removed so that all surfaces of each tooth may be visualized.

Step 2. Assessment: The veterinarian evaluates the entire oral cavity & records any abnormalities on a special dental record. Some examples of oral abnormalities are: tongue or lip lesions, deep pockets in the gums around the teeth and loose, broken or discolored teeth. These abnormalities may need to be evaluated with dental radiographs (xrays) to show us how the tooth is faring below the gumline.

Step 3. Subgingival cleaning: This is cleaning the area under the gumline. In our animal patients, this is the most important step. The subgingival plaque and calculus is what causes periodontal disease. This is the most common ailment diagnosed in ALL animal patients. Cleaning the tooth surface above the gumline will make the teeth look nice, but in reality has done little medically for the patient.

Step 4. Polishing: The mechanical removal of the plaque and calculus causes microscopic roughening of the tooth surface. This roughening increases the retentive ability of the tooth for plaque and calculus, which will buildup faster and increase the rapidity of periodontal disease progression. Polishing will smooth the surface and decrease the adhesive ability of plaque.

Step 5. (Subgingival/Sulcal) Lavage: The scaling and polishing of the teeth will cause a lot of debris to become trapped under the gums. This will cause local inflammation, as well as increase the chance of future periodontal disease. For this reason we gently flush the gingiva with an antibacterial solution.

Step 6. Fluoride treatment: The benefits of fluoride are that it strengthens enamel, decreases tooth sensitivity, and is reported to retard the formation of Feline Oral Resorptive Lesions, and be anti-plaque. Fluoride can be toxic if swallowed by dogs and cats and therefore we carefully remove any excess fluoride from the mouth before waking your pet.

Step 7. Treatments: If any abnormalities were found during the assessment and radiographs, various treatments may be recommended. Some examples of treatments are: tooth extraction, bonded sealants of fractures, local antibiotic treatment of pockets around the teeth. The veterinarian will explain any abnormalities and discuss treatment options. We are happy to provide an estimate at each stage of this procedure and to refer your pet to a veterinary dentist for more in depth treatments.

Step 8: Prevention: Prevention is one of the most important parts of the oral hygiene procedure. By cleaning the teeth, removing plaque and calculus above and below the gingiva and polishing, the mouth is "clean" for about six hours until plaque forms on the tooth surface again. If the patient is sent home without attention to prevention, there was little gained by the time, risk and expense incurred for the Oral ATP.

Some options for continued prevention of periodontal disease are: Oravet, a waxy substance that may be applied to the teeth to prevent plaque buildup, brushing daily, liquid additives for your pet’s water, larger kibble diets. We are happy to help you devise the best preventive plan for your pet.

