

SHAMROCK DIGEST

May/June 2009

DIRTY TEETH?

During your visit to the veterinary clinic, the veterinarian or technologist might comment about calculus on your companion's teeth. Calculus is just the technical word for tartar, the dark grey or brown build-up found on teeth. Calculus is calcified plaque and bacteria on the teeth and it often accumulates on the upper teeth at the very back of the mouth. Accompanying the calculus is gingivitis, or inflammation of the gums. Gingivitis can be identified by a dark pink or red appearance to the gingiva, especially at the base of the teeth. Together, calculus and gingivitis are the start of dental disease and this spells bad news for your companion's overall health, not just the teeth.

As gingivitis progresses, the gingiva recedes or pulls away from the tooth. The ligaments holding the teeth in place break down, the bone surrounding the teeth becomes infected and disintegrates. Calculus begins to form below the gum line. The teeth become loose. Severe dental disease can be identified by marked gingivitis, gingival recession, infection, purulent material and a bad smell.

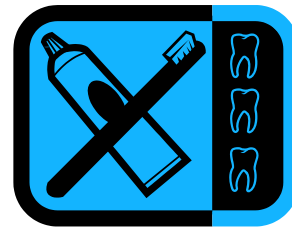
Although dental disease is very uncomfortable for the animal, most will continue to eat by either avoiding painful areas or not chewing their food.

The infection from your companion's mouth can easily cause infection in other parts of the body. The bacteria enter the bloodstream and can cause infection when it becomes lodged in various organs such as the heart, liver or kidneys. If the organ is already dysfunctional, the infection can make that dysfunction worse.

If your pet has calculus and gingivitis, a proper cleaning of the teeth, above and below the gums, is necessary.

This will require a general anesthetic. Remember, people brush their teeth twice daily and yet we still have a cleaning performed at the dental office once or twice a year.

Before undergoing anesthesia, we will require blood tests to assess the health status of your pet's organs. The results of the tests may cause us to postpone anesthesia or alter the anesthetic drugs for the safety of your companion. Intravenous (IV) fluids will be given before and during the procedure to ensure that your pet is not dehydrated and to support the organs during the anesthetic. While anesthetized, various functions are assessed including your companion's blood pressure and heart rate.



The good news is that dental disease is preventable! By teaching your companion to allow daily tooth brushing, you will be keeping bacteria and plaque at minimal levels. Brushing also allows for inspection of the gingiva and teeth, making you aware of potential problems. Do not start training your pet to have teeth brushed if there is already a bad smell or loose teeth! This can be painful and will result in your pet not allowing for brushing of the teeth. There are alternatives available for caregivers who are unable to brush their companion's teeth. Be aware that NONE of these products are as effective as brushing, but they may be able to help slow the accumulation of plaque and calculus.

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EXTRA ID

Collars and tags are well known forms of identification for companion animals. Both are easily purchased and available in a wide range of patterns and styles to suit you and your pet. The bad news is that not all animals are wearing their collars when they are found wandering or injured. There are other forms of ID available that can't fall off, but each has positive and negative points that must be considered when choosing identification for your companion.

Tattoos are drawn into the animal's right ear when they are anesthetized – commonly when they are spayed or castrated. Often tattoos are free at the time of surgery, they differentiate animals that look similar and they are readily visible to anyone looking. However, tattoos can fade and may not be legible. They are not necessarily useful in different provinces for tracking purposes. (Breeder tattoos are not useful for tracing owners. They serve primarily to identify the animal for show purposes)

Microchipping involves the insertion of a rice-sized chip under the scruff of the neck by the shoulder blades. This can be done at any age without anesthesia. There is a one-time fee for insertion of the chip and registration - the owner keeps information up to date with the microchip company. Microchip numbers always read clearly, the number cannot be altered, and the chip does not require anesthetic to place. Microchips are not readily visible, and they require a scanner to identify the numbers.

Ideally, our companions would be identified by all of these methods! No matter which method(s) you choose for your pet, remember to keep your information up to date and legible.

SPRING TIME CATS

Cats love to be outside in the spring for many reasons. The sun creates warm pavement for basking, bugs appear for chasing and it is not wet and muddy outside nearly as often.

If you have an older cat that has lost some hearing ability, consider more indoor time to avoid being hit by cars that they cannot hear.

Now is the time to have those kittens spayed or castrated. Female kittens can become pregnant as young as 4-5 months old, so if your cat has not already had surgery, book soon. Also, female cats with kittens can become pregnant while nursing, so don't wait until the last kitten finds a home!

SHAPING UP FIDO

Before you decide to put Fido onto an exercise and weight loss program, consider the following:

- Don't do too much too fast. Start with walking short distances, and then increase the distance and pace.
- Overweight, older dogs often have osteoarthritis. Using a glucosamine supplement for 6-8 weeks before starting an exercise plan will often help keep discomfort to a minimum while that extra weight gets walked off.
- Drastic food cutbacks can lead to malnutrition, never mind a dog who thinks starvation is only hours away. If you feed less than about 70% of the recommended amount, you might want to consider using a lower calorie formulation of the same food.
- Cut back on the treats. Dogs love to get treats throughout the day, and we love to give them out. Instead of 'junk food' treats, consider pieces of kibble, vegetables, fruit or even cat treats that are just plain smaller. No matter what you use for treats, keep it minimal.