

## Periodontal (Dental) Disease

Periodontal disease, which includes gingivitis and periodontitis, is an inflammation and/or infection of the gums and bone around a dog or cat's teeth. It is caused by the bacteria that accumulates in the mouth, forming soft plaque that later hardens into tartar. In comparison to gingivitis, periodontitis includes bone loss.

Most periodontal infections begin simply enough. Plaque, which is composed of bacteria, salivary proteins and food debris builds up in the space between the teeth and gums. This accumulation causes irritation, redness and swelling. Eventually, pockets form and deepen allowing bacteria to damage the tissue surrounding the tooth, that holds them in place.

At this stage, bacteria from the oral infection have access to the animal's bloodstream and therefore vital organs. The organs with the largest blood flow are the most susceptible to infection, these include the lungs, heart, kidneys, liver and even the brain.

The most common infection is within the heart, where bacteria is deposited on the valves and disrupts blood flow, resulting in a cardiac murmur. Damage to these organs caused by the infection can shorten the lives of cats and dogs and reduce their quality of life.

Periodontal disease is more serious than just having bad breath - multiple organ infection can significantly shorten life expectancy and quality of life.

If your pet displays any of these symptoms, serious periodontal disease may be present:

1. Bad Breath - one of the first signs of dental disease
2. A yellowish-brown crust of tartar on the teeth near the gum line
3. Red and swollen gums
4. Pain or bleeding when eating, or when the mouth or gums are touched
5. Decreased appetite or difficulty eating
6. Loose or missing teeth

If your pet has any of the above, contact your vet for a dental assessment and they will be able to have a look and book your pet in for a Dental with Scale and Polish under general anaesthetic to restore mouth health.