

## THE PERILS OF NOT LOOKING INTO YOUR DOG'S MOUTH



### What Are the Chances Your Dog Has A Dental Problem?

If you were to guess what percentage of dogs show signs of a periodontal disease at the age of 3, would you say 50%? Wouldn't that be a scary number? What if I told you it was 80%? Would you rush to look at your dog's gums and teeth? Well, you should!

80% of dogs show signs of periodontal disease by the age of 3. And that is a number for a general population of dogs. Small breed dogs are more prone to dental diseases than large dogs, so chances are that unless you brush your terrier's teeth daily, you have a problem. Without brushing, by the age of 3 your dog's teeth had 1095 days to form layer after layer of hardened tartar, over thousand layers in total. **Dogs are five times more prone to periodontal disease than people, so we tend to overlook this problem.**

It works like this. A dog eats, chews, puts various things in his mouth and a large spectrum of bacteria take up permanent residence. When the bacteria adhere to the teeth they form a thin film of plaque. That plaque is then mineralized into a hard tartar. It takes only 24 to 36 hours for soft plaque to become mineralized. That short time frame is why only *daily* brushing can prevent

tartar buildup. Doing it less frequently is better than not doing it at all but you would be allowing layers of tartar to form on the days you don't brush, and when you did brush, you would be only removing plaque that had most recently formed.

The plaque and tartar cause an inflammatory response (gingivitis) as the bacteria are foreign invaders, after all. That inflammatory response causes the gums to separate from the teeth, away from the bacterial attackers. Unfortunately, the process is a downward spiral. The receding gums allow the bacteria to bury under the gum line, enter the bloodstream, and eventually course through the dog's body gradually seeding the internal organs with infection. A dog with a periodontal disease may have micro-infections in many of his organs. It's not about the superficiality of the pearly whites: periodontal disease shortens your dog's life and affects its quality.

## Symptoms of Dental Problems in Norwich Terriers

When the periodontal disease is in its early stages, you might not even notice any symptoms. The dog might have occasional "bad breath", an early sign of a periodontal disease, or not be as enthusiastic about his chew toys. Terriers are especially stoic and can live with considerable pain without giving you clues representative of the degree of their discomfort.



This is why you have to check the inside of your dog's mouth. The visual symptom of periodontal disease is dark tartar buildup on canines and adjacent teeth, accompanied by reddened gums.

Another telltale sign of your dog living with dental discomfort is reluctance to eat hard food, or learning to swallow kibble without any chewing.

## CUPS Disease

In some Norwich, periodontal disease might take a form of Chronic Ulcerative Parodontal Stomatitis (CUPS), also referred to as idiopathic stomatitis, a condition with its own set of pronounced symptoms.

I believe the condition is more common in Norwich than reported. CUPS in its most typical presentation in dogs involves painful ulcers, therefore the word "ulcerative" is in its name. In Norwich terriers CUPS often does not express itself with ulcers and so semantically a more

befitting name for the condition as expressed in our breed is its secondary name: idiopathic stomatitis. However, most veterinary literature and official diagnostic codes use the nomenclature CUPS, and so I will follow this canon, even though Norwich might not necessarily form ulcers. The absence of ulcers probably explains why Norwich are not often diagnosed with CUPS until specifically tested for it.

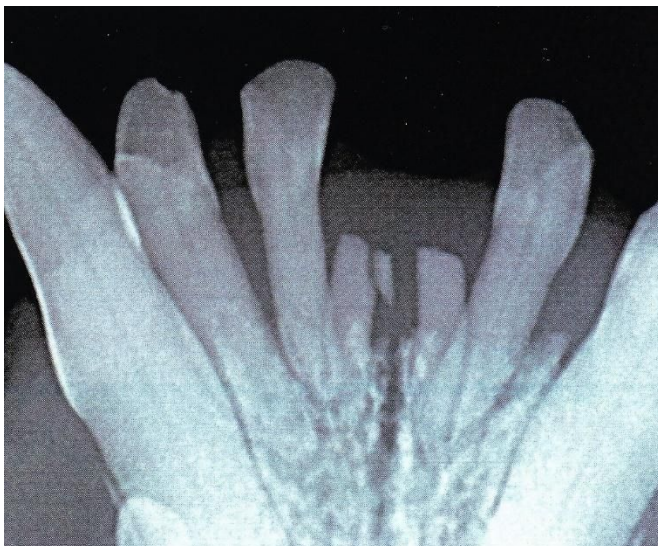
CUPS is a serious inflammatory response to bacteria in the plaque and tartar. Think severe allergic reaction to plaque. Just like “regular” periodontal disease, but much, much more serious. The inflammatory response in CUPS puts the entire dog’s mouth on fire. It’s no longer a battle with plaque bacteria. It’s a war! Inflammation is so unrelenting and harsh that it results in ulcers in most dogs, and in painfully inflamed gum tissue in Norwich terriers. The affected dogs experience considerable discomfort. In serious cases, your dog’s breath might become extremely unpleasant and he might be reluctant to have his mouth examined. He will form tartar very fast, often requiring full dental cleanings every few months.

As the inflammatory condition continues, the pockets between teeth and gums become deeper and there is bone loss under the gum line, but even as the disease rages, most of the damage is not visible to you.

When an owner of a Norwich Terrier tells me that their dog is not an enthusiastic eater of his kibble, I always suspect discomfort while eating hard foods. If the dog is 3 years old or older I urge the owners to bring the dog to the vet to get dental x-rays. On numerous occasions, the radiographs revealed bone loss and cracked teeth under the gums. Imagine the pain!

Research on the condition shows that a change from a predominantly gram-positive to a predominantly gram-negative bacterial flora takes place in the dog’s mouth, which seems to trigger an even stronger inflammatory response in affected dogs. Without intervention, the disease is a constant and deepening misery for your terrier.

Diagnosis and treatment of CUPS should be ideally conducted by a board certified veterinary dental specialist. Unfortunately, there are very few of them. In my very populous state of New Jersey at this time there are only two such specialists. To find a specialist in your area visit American Veterinary Dental College at [www.avdc.org](http://www.avdc.org)



I learned about CUPS when my own dog was diagnosed a few years ago. Taking dental radiographs was a critical first step in diagnosing her condition. Kate is now 12 years old and doing great on the combination of a low dose of antibiotics every other day and probiotics on the days without an antibiotic. The treatment seems to be keeping the gram-negative

bacteria in check. Kate had all her incisors removed but her remaining teeth have never looked better. She is free of discomfort and still able to catch rodents!

## Prevention of Tartar Buildup



I know you will hear about additives to water, gum sprays, and miracle dental chews that are supposed to stave off dental disease. By all means, try them all, but please do not consider them to be a substitute to daily brushing.

Good news is that a vaccine preventing the colonization of bacteria implicated in periodontal disease is on the horizon. NTCA has been one of the sponsors of

research conducted at the University of Glasgow by Dr. Marcello Pasquale Riggio, PhD: *Defining the Specific Species of Bacteria That Contribute To Canine Periodontal Disease*. We are awaiting the publication of the results. The study was a first step towards developing a vaccine for immunizing dogs against the microorganisms implicated in periodontitis.

## A Word About Scaling Teeth

Many Norwich terrier owners scale their dog's teeth. Unfortunately, you may be doing more harm than good. Even as you remove the hardened tartar, and the teeth look better, you are not preventing periodontal disease and you may be even making the problem worse. How? Scaling teeth leaves microscopic scratches. Without polishing after scaling, those scratches become a perfect spot for the food and debris to build up. Only cleaning teeth under general anesthesia allows both for the tartar to be removed, even under the gums, and the teeth polished.

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Dig-n-Pop Norwich Terriers