

Teeth Can Do More Than Bite

November 6, 2011 by Bonnie Carpenter, NTCA Member

Teeth can make your dog sick, very sick. When they are not cared for properly, the resultant plaque and tartar accumulation and periodontal disease are breeding grounds for bacteria that travel to other parts of the body, damaging the heart, kidneys, liver, lungs and other organs. A recent article in *Dog World* by Shawn Messonnier DVM stated, "Periodontal disease is actually the most common cause of infectious disease in dogs and cats." An article by M. Christine Zink DVM PhD said, "Periodontal disease is, in fact, the most common reason for kidney failure in dogs."

Plaque, Tartar, Periodontal Disease – What's the difference?

Simply stated, plaque is a gummy substance that forms on the teeth within a few hours after a meal. Plaque hardens into tartar within 24 hours. Bacteria loves it, resides in it, and multiples there. As the tartar enlarges, it pushes the gums away from the roots of the teeth. The gums redden and become inflamed; the bone begins to dissolve and the teeth get loose. It is bad enough that the bacteria infected the gums, but it also gets absorbed into the bloodstream and moves to other parts of the body. Liver enzymes are often raised, showing that the bacteria are poisoning the body. Antibody complexes trapped in the small blood vessels of the kidneys impede them from filtering the blood to remove wastes and result in kidney failure.

Yikes, now I am scared, what can I do?

BRUSHING



Brushing your dog's teeth is an effective means of removing plaque BEFORE it turns into tartar. Brush frequently—every day is ideal. Less than every other day won't show any benefit and brushing weekly won't cut it.

TOOLS YOU WILL NEED

- **Brushes**

- There are special brushes for dogs, but a child's soft brush works well too for small Norwich mouths. Besides, they like Tweety or Bugs Bunny on top. Electric toothbrushes also work very well.
- **Toothpastes**
- Use one formulated for dogs. Let your dog pick the flavor and you pick the ingredients. Look for the enzyme glucose oxidase that breaks down sugars that adhere to teeth.
- – ***Xylitol can compromise liver function and must be avoided in toothpastes and all other products.***
- **Scalers**
- Oops, the tartar got ahead of me and won't come off. A flat-edged, double-ended scaler is good to remove tartar along the gum line. A pointed scaler can get in the crevices of the molars. Place the scaler along the gum line and gently but firmly pull down. If you can, place some gauze or a cotton make-up remover pad on the teeth below where you are working to protect the gums in case your tool slips. Also, it helps to collect the tartar you pull off. Hydrogen peroxide on a cotton ball is good for cleaning up bleeding gums.

Best advice?

Start with a young dog. Slow and fun introductions make your life easier. Touch the teeth with your finger and praise. Add toothpaste and make it like a treat and praise. Do all of the above with the toothbrush and praise. Pull the lips up or back out of the way and brush the outsides of the teeth. I brush the inside of the teeth when I get good cooperation. Get all the teeth, especially the small teeth behind the upper molars. Eventually you will find the position and lighting most favorable to you: holding the dog's head on a sofa arm to brace it, using a grooming arm to hold the head up, placing a small tennis ball (big enough not to swallow) in the mouth to keep it open, wearing a head lamp (you not the dog), etc. But he is acting up! Ignore that and try again later. Have someone gently hold the dog, no scolding, just matter of fact, and proceed with confidence. Eventually he will realize he is not about to be killed. As with anything you just love to do, get into a daily routine of time and place. SMILE!



OTHER TOOLS TO HELP WIN THE BATTLE

■ **Cleansers**

- Easy, just squirt into the mouth and massage the teeth and gums with the mouth closed. A good one is Nolvadent Oral Cleansing Solution. It kills bacteria that causes plaque and, if used before brushing and scaling, it makes the job easier. These products contain either chlorhexidine, a very potent plaque retardant, or enzymes. Some stain the teeth with too frequent use. Another is Pet Oral Care Mist, by Sorbay, which has good reviews. VetzLife Oral Care Spray, containing herbal extracts, purports to soften and eliminate tartar and can reverse oral disease. Another herbal extract product is Leba III, by LebaLab Inc.

■ **Gels**

- Spread gel onto the gums and, through salivation, it will cover the teeth. Plaque Off is one such product. VetzLife Oral Care Gel has herbal extracts. Oxyfresh

makes a gel and a rinse. However, products may contain artificial dyes. For bleeding and inflamed or infected gums, try Biotene Veterinarian Antiseptic Oral Gel.

- **Water Additives**

- Additives are concentrated cleansers added to the dog's water bowl. Dental Fresh is one I use.

- **Dental Wipes**

- Wipes are an easily portable, well-tolerated product that contains another plaque-fighting ingredient, sodium hexametaphosphate. One brand is Pro Dental Professional Dental Wipes.

- **Rx OraVet, by Merial, is a gel.**

- OraVet is a polymer that attracts plaque and tartar, keeping formations away from the teeth.

- **Dental Chews**

- Chews are rawhides that have been impregnated with the same biofilm breaking enzymes as in doggie toothpaste. Also, they may contain chlorhexidine with the tooth staining side effects. A dental treat should contain a calculus inhibiting substance such as SHMP.

- **Food**

- It seems to be a myth that kibble is superior to canned. The dryness and hardness of kibble alone doesn't do the job. Dental formulas of food or TD biscuits work because of their shape and fibrous character that allow them to scrub rather than shatter, coating agents. The possible addition of phosphorus compounds helps reduce the rate at which plaque is calcified. There are proponents of raw food and bones who believe the chewing action and enzymes keep teeth clean. Others say it is dangerous. Chicken necks, because they are made of cartilage and not bones, help mitigate the dangers of broken teeth and obstructions.

- **Homeopathic Treatments**

- Fragaria, in the form of pellets placed in the mouth, is said to minimize the rate of tartar buildup. Coenzyme Q10, a powerful antioxidant, helps maintain oral health. Another recommendation is Traumeel, by the Heel Corp., which comes in the form of a liquid or gel that is to be applied for several weeks after a cleaning.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

- **Cleanings**

- Your vet will tell you when his services are needed to clean under the gum line. Disease-causing bacteria can be harbored there without your knowledge. The majority feel that a thorough and safe job can only be done under anesthesia, as

compared to practitioners who only use sedatives. Consult knowledgeable Norwich people about the type of anesthesia first. Some people even feel that scraping the teeth yourself can actually damage the teeth and gums by not removing all the bacteria.



OBVIOUSLY...

The best course of action is prevention and that means brushing, brushing, brushing. That seems pretty simple now, faced with all the alternatives and consequences, doesn't it?