

VETERINARY ASSOCIATES OF CAPE COD

COMMON DISEASES IN SENIOR DOGS: PERIODONTAL DISEASE

The most frequent complaint of senior pet owners is dental problems, including bad breath and difficulty eating. More than 85% of dogs over four years of age have some form of periodontal disease, a painful inflammatory condition in which bacteria attack the gums, ligament, and bone tissues that surround and support the teeth. Senior dogs, generally those seven or more years of age, are especially susceptible to periodontal disease.

That's why it's important to have your dog's teeth examined by your veterinarian on a routine basis. If left unchecked, bacteria from the mouth can enter the bloodstream and travel to major organs, starting infections there and seriously compromising the health of your dog.

Most periodontal infections begin simply enough. Plaque, which is composed of bacteria, salivary proteins, and food debris, builds up in the groove between teeth and gums, causing irritation, redness, and swelling. Eventually pockets form and deepen, allowing bacteria to damage the tissues that hold teeth in place.

At this stage, bacteria from the oral infection have a clear path to the dog's bloodstream and vital organs. The organs with the highest blood flow are most susceptible to infections: lungs, heart, kidneys, liver and even the brain. Damage to these organs may shorten a dog's life.

Look for these warning signs:

- Bad breath – one of the first signs of dental disease
- A yellowish-brown crust of plaque on the teeth near the gum line
- Red and swollen gums
- Pain or bleeding when your dog eats or when the mouth or gums are touched
- Decreased appetite or difficulty eating
- Loose or missing teeth



If your dog displays any of these signs, periodontal disease may be present and your dog may need professional dental care.

At Veterinary Associates of Cape Cod, we recommend the following as an “at home” dental care program:

Best:

- Brushing at least 3 times per week (every day is ideal).
- CET chews for treats at least 3 times per week.
- Hill's T/D diet as a primary diet or as treats.

Very Good:

- CET chews for treats at least 3 times per week.
- Hill's T/D diet as a primary diet or as treats.

Regular dental checkups are important to maintaining not only your dog's oral health, but overall health as well. In fact, because dogs age more quickly than humans, dental exams should be performed every six months as your pet ages. Think of it as a necessary part of your pet's preventive care plan. Talk to your veterinarian about professional dental care and what you can do to keep your dog's teeth and body healthy.

FLIP THE LIP ON YOUR PET! HOW DOES YOUR PET RATE?

Grade I Dental Disease:



There are very early signs of gingivitis (inflammation of the gums). There is a small degree of staining on the teeth. The gums next to the teeth have a small amount of light red discoloration, but no recession.

Grade II Dental Disease:



There is significant gingivitis. In addition, the gums begin to swell and even recede slightly from the teeth.

Grade III Dental Disease:



There is significant gingivitis and swelling of the gums. The pet has developed receding gum lines and early bone loss has occurred around the teeth.

Grade IV Dental Disease:



This is the most severe. These teeth have all the signs of grade III disease, but in addition there is a pus-like discharge and the teeth are unstable (loose).