**DENTAL DISEASE**

Dental Disease is very common in dogs and cats and like in humans it is predisposed to by poor diet and lack of appropriate preventative care. There also some immunodeficiency diseases, especially in cats, that can lead to poor dental health.

**Prevention**

The most important step to preventing poor dental health as dogs and cats get older is to start good dental hygiene routines from a young age. This prevents the build up of plaque that can ultimately damage the teeth.

Tooth Brushing: This is the most effective way of controlling build up of plaque but it has to be done frequently, ideally every day, to be of any great effect. If you are able to, it is best to start this from puppy/kitten-hood but the process is the same regardless of age. Use an enzymatic toothpaste, NEVER one containing fluoride.

**How to introduce your pet to a toothbrush!**

1. Get your pet used to you running your finger along their teeth, then put a little toothpaste on your finger
2. Use a soft finger brush to spread the toothpaste around, starting off gently then getting a little firmer
3. Once they are happy with this use a soft tooth brush.

Food: Ideally dogs and cats that have problems with their teeth should be on a diet which helps to break down plaque as they chew. There are several specially formulated ones on the market but any hard food will be better than a soft food in this respect; however we do understand it can be hard with our fussier eaters!

Chews: There are several products on the market that are reported as being good for dental health (eg Dentastix, Veggident). Some people report very good success with these however they should ideally be used in conjunction with regular brushing. It is also important to note, that like any treat, they can be very high in fats and salts.

**Signs of Dental Disease**

Tartar build up

Smelly breath

Red/bleeding gums

Loose teeth

Pain on eating hard food

Drooling

**Treatment**

In the early stages of dental disease, a good brushing routine should be enough to reverse any changes in gum health.

Once a lot of tartar starts to build up brushing alone will not be enough to control it so at this stage we usually recommend a general anaesthetic and a dental. Often if we are able to catch it early enough this is a very quick procedure to just scale off the tartar and polish the teeth to prevent further build up. After this procedure it is very important to continue with regular brushing at home to save the process having to be repeated.

If during the operation we find any loose or diseased teeth we will remove them. In cats we sometimes find lesions known as resorptive lesions which can be caused by immunodeficiency cases and are where the tooth starts to dissolve. These are incredibly painful and even if there is only a small lesion present we often have to remove the tooth.