



## February is National Pet Dental Health Month

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BIRMINGHAM, Mich. - If you have pets, you know just how expensive veterinary care can be. For pet owners looking for ways to save money in vet costs, taking care of your pets teeth could be the first place to start to take a bite out of the costs.

**Dr. Cindy Houlihan, DVM, of The Cat Practice in Birmingham joins FOX 2** to discuss pet dental care in honor of National Pet Dental Health month. Houlihan tells us that dental care is one of the most overlooked pet care areas that can lead to serious illness, and serious veterinary expenses down the road.

Pay attention to your dogs and cats pearly whites, although they rarely get cavities, plaque and tartar can cause gingivitis and periodontal disease. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by age 3, and 85% of adult pets have some form of periodontal disease. Not only can pets experience tooth decay, bleeding gums and tooth loss, but underlying bacteria can travel through the bloodstream and cause heart, lung, liver and kidney damage.

Pets feel the same pain as humans if they have mouth ulcers, tooth decay and tooth abscesses, however they often mask their suffering. Dr. Houlihan says to **watch your pet closely and immediately see your veterinarian if your pet is showing any of these signs:**

- Reluctance to play or is quieter than normal.
- Reluctance to eat or is having difficulty picking up food or chewing dry food.
- Favoring one side of the mouth or pawing at the mouth.
- Noticeable pain when you touch his/her mouth or face.
- Bad breath (halitosis) which could signal build up of bacteria.
- Redness or bleeding around the gums.
- Swelling in the face or mouth area.
- Excessive drooling.

Regular dental care routine for pets is essential to ensure their overall wellbeing and reduce the risk of more serious health problems in the future. This should include annual dental exams in which the veterinarian will ask about and check for these symptoms as well as look for loose or broken teeth, tartar build up and infection around the teeth or gums.

### **To take care of your pets dental health there are a number of things you can do from home:**

- Brush your pet's teeth weekly with specially formulated dog or cat toothpaste.
- Feed your pet specially-formulated foods that combat plaque and tartar buildup. For a complete list, go to [this website](#)
- When purchasing pet foods or treats, look for the seal of acceptance from the Veterinary Oral Health Council, an organization initiated by the American Veterinary Dental Society to guide consumers. The seal appears on products that meet defined standards for plaque and tartar control in dogs and cats.

[Click here for a video from The Cat Practice website on how to brush your cats teeth.](#)

Dr. Houlihan has been a veterinarian since 1986. She is co-owner of The Cat Practice, Michigan's first cats-only veterinary hospital which is celebrating its 30th year. The Cat Practice provides advanced preventative and medical care with an emphasis on early detection to help cats live longer, better and healthier lives.

The Cat Practice cares for feline purebred and mixed breeds from around southeastern Michigan. For information go to [thecatpracticepc.com](http://thecatpracticepc.com) or call 248-540-3390.

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