



National Pet Dental Health Month

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(WJBK) - Veterinarian Dr. Cindy Houlihan of The Cat Practice in Birmingham says that with early detection and proper care, dental disease can be prevented and managed.

During February, which is National Pet Dental Health Month, she is reminding pet owners to routinely examine Fluffy's or Fido's pearly whites.

[Video available on Fox Website. Click here.](#)

"Early detection is key," Dr. Houlihan says. "The more serious the dental disease becomes, the more risk for your dog or cat. Unfortunately, if a pet is experiencing organ damage by the time the symptoms surface, it's usually a very serious condition. And pet owners are often surprised that this can occur even in young animals."

According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of dental disease by age 3. Pets experience tooth decay, bleeding gums and tooth loss.

In serious cases, bacteria travel through the bloodstream and cause heart, lung, liver and kidney damage.

It's felt that pet owners postponing routine veterinary exams for economic reasons is part of the problem. In addition, pets are living longer and the disease escalates with age; 85% of adult pets have some form of dental disease.

Dr. Houlihan says that signs of dental disease in a dog or cat can be subtle, but they can be spotted if owners take some time to conduct a basic oral exam. This can be done by sitting down with your pet and carefully checking his or her mouth for:

- Noticeable pain when you touch his/her mouth or face.
- Bad breath (halitosis) which could signal a build-up of bacteria.
- Redness or bleeding around the gums.
- Swelling in the face or mouth area.
- Excessive drooling from the mouth.

Dr. Houlihan says to also watch for changes in your pet's behavior which could signal that he or she is in pain. Pets feel the same pain as humans if they have mouth ulcers, tooth decay and tooth abscesses, however they often mask their suffering. Behavior changes can be subtle and might include:

- Reluctance to play or being quieter than normal.
- Reluctance to eat or difficulty picking up or chewing food.
- Favoring one side of the mouth.
- Pawing at the mouth.

Dr. Houlihan says that a regular dental care routine for pets is essential and should include annual dental exams in which the veterinarian checks for loose or broken teeth, tarter build up and infection around the teeth or gums.

What is the best way to prevent dental disease in the first place? In addition to regular veterinary exams, Dr. Houlihan says pet owners should:

- Brush pet's teeth weekly with specially formulated dog or cat toothpaste.
- Feed pets specially-formulated foods that combat plaque and tartar buildup. Look for the seal of acceptance from the Veterinary Oral Health Council that appears on such products as:

For dogs: Canine Greenies, Blue Chews, Friskies Cheweez Beef Hide, Science Diet Oral Care, IAMS VOHC Chunk Dental Defense Diet, and Eukanuba Adult Maintenance Diet

For cats: Science Diet Oral Care

Ask your veterinarian about prescription pet foods that fight plaque and tartar.

"Good oral care is one of the few areas in which pet owners can play a direct role in disease prevention," Dr. Houlihan says. "Plus they can save money in the long run by avoiding serious health issues later on."

Original link: <http://www.myfoxdetroit.com/dpp/mornings/weekend/national-pet-dental-health-month>