



**Stage 1 periodontal disease:**

There is visible tartar build up on the teeth and slight swelling and redness of the gums.



**Stage 2 and 3 periodontal disease:**

The gums are more swollen in stage 2, and there can be mild loss of bone around the tooth

roots, which is only visible on X-rays.

Stage 3 looks similar to stage 2 on the surface, but X-rays show more severe bone loss.



**Stage 4 periodontal disease:**

Stage 4 is very serious, with severe tartar accumulation, receded gum lines, tooth damage and decay, and bone loss.

**IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO AT HOME FOR MY PET'S ORAL HEALTH?**

With patience and positive reinforcement training, most dogs and cats will accept brushing. There are many products on the market that claim to improve dental health, but not all of them are effective. Talk with your veterinarian about any dental products, treats, dental specific diets, and home brushing activities you are considering for your pet.

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**FOR MORE RESOURCES:**

American Veterinary Medical Association  
[avma.org/PetDental](http://avma.org/PetDental)

American Veterinary Dental College  
[avdc.org](http://avdc.org)

American Animal Hospital Association  
[aaha.org/pet\\_owner](http://aaha.org/pet_owner)



[avma.org](http://avma.org)

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# PET DENTAL CARE

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## WHAT IS VETERINARY DENTISTRY AND WHO PROVIDES IT?

Veterinary dentistry, like human dentistry, includes preventive care, cleaning, extraction, and repair of teeth. Pets can receive similar dental care to people, including root canals and other advanced procedures. Dental procedures are performed by a veterinarian or a board-certified veterinary dentist. In some areas, veterinary technicians are allowed to perform certain dental procedures under the supervision of a veterinarian.

Typical steps of a dental exam:

- The veterinarian will examine the pet's entire mouth to look for any abnormalities in the teeth, gums, tongue, or other tissues.
- Radiographs (X-rays) may be needed to evaluate the health of the jaw bone and tooth roots below the gum line.
- Dental cleaning under anesthesia includes scaling that will remove dental plaque and tartar, followed by polishing.

## WHY DOES PET DENTISTRY REQUIRE ANESTHESIA?

Unlike people, your pet doesn't understand the importance of dental care and the need to remain still, and might react by moving, trying to escape or even biting. Anesthesia makes it possible to perform the dental procedures with less stress and pain for your pet. It also allows for a more thorough cleaning because your pet isn't moving around and risking injury from the dental equipment. If X-rays are needed, better quality images are obtained when your pet is still.

**Most dental disease occurs below the gum line where you can't see it. Damage may already be occurring even though your pet's teeth look healthy.**

**Regularly brushing your pet's teeth is the single most effective action you can take to keep your pet's teeth healthy and possibly prevent most of the common oral diseases. Daily brushing is best, but not always possible. Brushing several times a week can also be effective.**

Although anesthesia will always have risks, it is safe overall, and the benefits of using it for dentistry far outweigh the risks. Most pets are on their feet within minutes of waking up and can usually go home the same day. Your veterinarian can explain the measures they take to keep your pet safe during anesthesia and recovery.

### Before and after dental cleaning



#### Before:

Red, swollen gums  
Build-up of tartar and plaque



#### After:

Healthier gums  
Cleaner teeth

## WHAT TYPES OF DENTAL PROBLEMS CAN A PET HAVE?

Some examples of dental problems that may require veterinary dentistry:

- Extra teeth or retained baby teeth
- Broken teeth and roots
- Broken or fractured jaw
- Abscesses or infected teeth
- Periodontal disease
- Palate defects such as cleft palate
- Cysts or tumors in the mouth
- Malocclusion or misalignment of teeth and bite

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ORAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN A PET?

Your pet's teeth should be checked at least once a year by your veterinarian for early signs of a problem and to keep your pet's mouth healthy. Although many signs of dental problems are obvious, nonspecific signs such as irritability and behavioral changes also can result from oral diseases. If you observe any of the following signs, contact your veterinarian. Always use caution when evaluating your pet's mouth because a pet in pain may bite.

- Bad breath
- Reduced appetite
- Broken or loose teeth
- Bleeding from the mouth
- Teeth that are discolored or covered in tartar
- Abnormal chewing, drooling or dropping food from the mouth
- Swelling in the areas surrounding the mouth

## WHAT IS PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

Periodontal disease is the most common dental condition in dogs and cats. By the time your pet is 3 years old, he or she will very likely already have early evidence of periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease is an inflammatory condition of the structures that surround and support the teeth. Early detection and treatment are critical because advanced periodontal disease can cause severe problems and pain for your pet. Periodontal disease doesn't just impact your pet's mouth; other health problems associated with periodontal disease include kidney, liver and heart muscle changes.

Periodontal disease starts with plaque that hardens into tartar. Tartar above the gum line can often easily be seen and removed, but the plaque and tartar below the gum line are damaging and set the stage for infection and damage to the jawbone and tissues that connect the tooth and jawbone. Periodontal disease is graded on a scale of 0 (normal) to 4 (severe).