

Common Signs of Dental Disease

Keeping your cat's teeth clean may prevent serious dental disease. Learn to recognize these symptoms of potential problems.

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Red gums and bad breath are indicators of dental and periodontal disease in cats. Drooling, bloody discharge and tooth loss are other important indications. Some bad breath is normal during the teething period in kittens. Pain on eating or opening the mouth may be caused by certain oral inflammatory conditions.

Most veterinarians perform dental cleaning and extractions. A thorough cleaning of your cat's teeth may be needed yearly to every few years. The frequency depends on your cat's diet and predisposition to plaque buildup and gingivitis. Prophylactic cleaning of your cat's teeth can prevent tooth loss and preserve the teeth into old age.

Bad breath or difficulty eating may also indicate serious oral problems such as oral abscesses or tumors. Owners may not recognize the severity of dental disease and the amount of discomfort to their cats. While most cats with severe dental disease will continue to eat, owners often remark that their cat "is like a new animal" after dentistry is performed.

Many owners worry about having dentistry performed on their cat's teeth because procedures require general anesthesia. Proper dental cleaning cannot be performed without general anesthesia. Anesthetic options available in veterinary practice today are advanced. Short-acting anesthetic gases such as isoflurane and high-tech anesthesia monitoring allow veterinarians to perform dentistry even on cats 20 years of age or older. Preanesthetic blood tests can determine if any other risks need to be addressed during dental or other surgical procedures. If you have concerns about the safety of dentistry and your cat, talk to your veterinarian about what precautions will be taken.

Another major concern is how the cat will eat if many or all its teeth need to be extracted. Some feline patients eat exclusively dry diets even after all their teeth have been removed.