

Too Young for Gum Disease?

Gingivitis can occur in cats as young as 6 or 8 months.

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As pets age, most experience some gingivitis that, if not promptly addressed, develops into advanced gum (periodontal) disease. However, gingivitis can occur in cats as young as 6 or 8 months and is often associated with little or no tartar (calculus) accumulation. This condition is called juvenile-onset gingivitis. If left untreated, irreversible periodontal disease can develop by 1 to 2 years of age. The exact cause of this condition is unknown, but genetics may play a role, because some purebred cats are predisposed. Cats with this condition require daily home care to avoid tooth loss. Once periodontal disease progresses to periodontitis (advanced stage), treatment focuses more on damage-control than prevention. Determining the disease's advancement involves a thorough oral exam, including measuring the depth of pockets in the gums between the teeth, the amount of gum recession and X-rays of the teeth and jaw. Treatment of periodontal disease requires professional cleaning, which is performed under general anesthesia. The veterinarian uses hand instruments and ultrasonic equipment to remove plaque and calculus and clean root surfaces. Most advanced cases can be prevented through early detection and appropriate treatment. Your cat should receive antibiotics a few days prior to the dental procedure, and for several days after the procedure. Any dental procedure can cause bacteria to enter the bloodstream through inflamed gums. Having antibiotics in the bloodstream during dentistry helps control the spread of these bacteria throughout the body. Implement regular home care after professional cleanings to prevent or delay future recurrence of periodontal disease.

- More Dental Care -