

Cats Need Regular Teeth Cleaning, Exams

During National Pet Dental Health Month, vets remind cat parents to maintain their pets' oral health.

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Does your cat have bad breath? Sore gums? Cats need dental care, too, because they can suffer the same health problems as humans if treatment is ignored.

Gingivitis and periodontal disease in cats and dogs have become widespread, according to the California Veterinary Medical Association. As food particles and bacteria build up in a pet's mouth, plaque and tartar form on the teeth, which leads to gingivitis and can develop into periodontal disease. This disease can lead to tooth decay, bad breath, bleeding gums and tooth loss.

In addition, when bacteria from the disease enters a pet's bloodstream internal organs could be affected. This is treatable if caught early, but could lead to serious health problems if ignored.

The CVMA recommends annual dental exams for pets to detect problems before they become serious. Between exams, pet owners should be on the lookout for signs that can indicate dental problems, such as bad breath, tartar buildup, changes in eating habits, fractured or abscessed teeth and swollen, receding, or bleeding gums.

"All pet owners should start a regular dental care routine for their animals in consultation with their veterinarians," says Dr. Jeff Smith, president of the CVMA. "With regular oral health maintenance and checkups, most of these problems can be avoided."

Brush your pets' teeth daily or at least weekly to combat plaque and tartar buildup, experts recommend. Pets may initially resist, but if begun in short intervals and when pets are young, often cats will get comfortable with the experience.