

## Teeth Cleaning

**Find out what a vet recommends about teeth cleaning.**

*Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, D.V.M.*

Q. Should I have my cats teeth cleaned?

Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, D.V.M., says: Cats need a healthy mouth to survive because their eating, drinking, and grooming depends upon it. Dental health is influenced by genetics, diet, and home care. Preventive home care options include tooth brushing, oral rinses and wipes, and specially formulated treats and diets, but more serious conditions such as gingivitis require a visit to your veterinarian. Early signs of gingivitis include mouth odor and a red, raised line at the tooth-gum line. Without proper care, plaque and tartar build on the teeth and bacteria lodge within these substances, which damages the gums. Left untreated, tooth erosion, root infection, and penetration of bacteria into the sinuses or blood stream occur. Studies show that bad teeth are a source of infection that impacts other organs such as the kidneys, especially in geriatric cats.

To ensure a more serious condition does not occur, your cats mouth needs to be examined at least annually by a veterinarian. During this exam your cats gums, teeth, and tongue are evaluated for problems. If gingivitis, plaque, or tartar buildup is evident, the best treatment is a professional cleaning by your veterinarian. This process involves probing and evaluating each tooth, hand scaling, ultrasonic scaling, polishing, and a fluoride treatment while your cat is under general anesthesia. Although some cats may allow superficial scaling of their teeth, anesthesia is needed for a thorough procedure that uses sharp instruments under and around the gums. Diseased teeth are usually extracted. Some cats need annual or semiannual dental cleaning, while others require the procedure only once once or twice in a lifetime.

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