

Pet Care Health Tip of the Month

Since February is Pet Dental Care month, Dr. Don Costlow, Owner and President of the Newton Veterinary Hospital in Newton, NJ, wanted to take this opportunity to give pet owners some information about this important – yet sometimes neglected – part of their pet's overall health care regimen.

To prevent dental problems, Dr. Costlow recommends annual check-ups. Senior pets or pets with a history of dental problems should be checked every six months.

The most common sign that a pet has dental problems is bad breath. Other signs include: yellow or brownish teeth; red, swollen gums; pain or bleeding when eating; decreased appetite; dropping food or difficulty when eating; and loose or missing teeth.

Dr. Costlow said the most common dental problem they see at the Newton Veterinary Hospital is severe tartar build-up. Left untreated, this can lead to weight loss (due to eating difficulties), abscess formation, and loss of teeth. Bacteria stored in the plaque can even get into the bloodstream, travel to the heart, liver and kidneys and damage these vital organs.

A professional teeth cleaning, combined with antibiotics (if necessary) can usually clear up the problem.

To prevent tartar build-up, tartar control treats can help, but they are not a substitute for brushing. Human toothpaste can cause vomiting, so look for toothpastes made especially for pets. They have appealing flavors and can be safely swallowed.

Dr. Costlow says, "To get your pet used to the idea of brushing, start by giving the toothpaste as a treat, without brushing. Then, brush only the front teeth, praise your pet, and gradually work up to brushing the entire mouth. You can use pet specific brushes, finger cots with brushes at the end or soft children's brushes. Daily brushing and regular check-ups are the best way to keep your pet's teeth and gums clean and healthy for life."

Dr. Don Costlow is the Owner and President of the Newton Veterinary Hospital (www.newtonvet.com) in Newton, NJ. You can e-mail Dr. Costlow with your pet health concerns at mail@newtonvet.com.