

Dental disease in dogs

Overview

- Dental (tooth and gum) disease is a painful problem, and can lead to other problems such as kidney and heart disease.
- It's important to check your dog's mouth regularly because most dogs with dental problems continue to eat despite being uncomfortable.
- Contact your vet for advice if you notice a problem with your dog's mouth and have them checked by a vet once a year.
- Poor dental hygiene is one of the most common cause of tooth and gum disease in dogs - brush your dog's teeth daily to prevent problems developing.

General information



We are a nation of dog lovers, but none of us like bad doggy breath! Unfortunately, dental disease is a very common problem in pet dogs, mostly due to a lack of tooth brushing and:

- **Age** - dental disease is common in older dogs due to wear and tear.
- **Breed** - some breeds are prone to dental disease, often due to the shape of their mouth (i.e. very cramped or narrow). Breeds more prone include [Yorkshire Terriers](#), [Greyhounds](#), [Whippets](#) (and other sight hounds), [Cavalier King Charles](#)

[Spaniels](#), [Pugs](#), [Bulldogs](#), [Shih Tzus](#), and other flat faced breeds.

- **Diet** - a poor diet makes dental disease more likely.
- **Retained baby teeth** - your dog's baby teeth will begin falling out at approximately 4 months old when their adult teeth start to come through. If their baby teeth don't fall out, dental problems are more likely due to an overcrowded mouth. Your vet might recommend removing these baby teeth under anaesthetic if they are causing a problem.

Some of the most common dental problems that affect dogs are:

- [Plaque and tartar build up](#)
- [Gingivitis](#)
- [A tooth root abscess](#)
- [Cracked or broken teeth](#)

Symptoms

Symptoms of dental disease in dogs include:

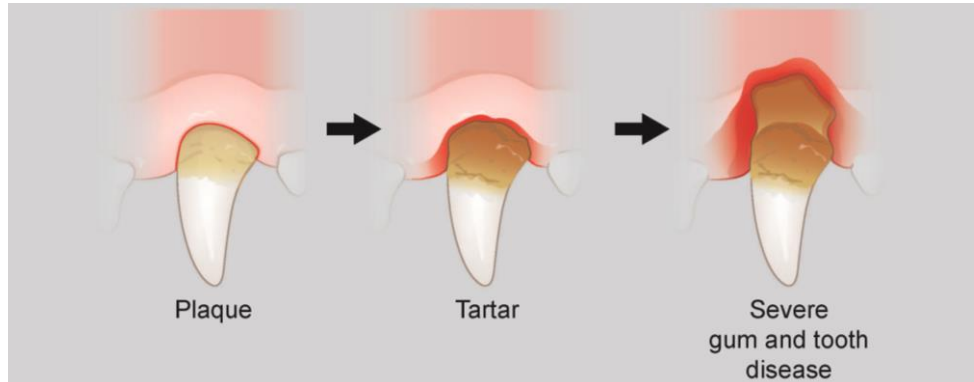
- [Halitosis \(bad breath\)](#)
- [Pain or difficulty eating i.e. chewing on one side of the mouth](#)
- Weight loss
- [Plaque and tartar](#)
- Red, inflamed, bleeding gums
- [Wobbly, missing or broken teeth](#)
- Excessive drooling
- Preferring soft food to biscuits
- A swelling on the face (can indicate a [tooth root abscess](#))
- Pawing at/rubbing the mouth/face
- Blood stained saliva

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if you suspect your dog has dental disease. They will have a good look inside your dog's mouth (which can be very difficult to do at home!)

Contact your vet for an urgent appointment if your dog is unable to close his/her mouth or is in too much pain to eat.

Plaque and tartar



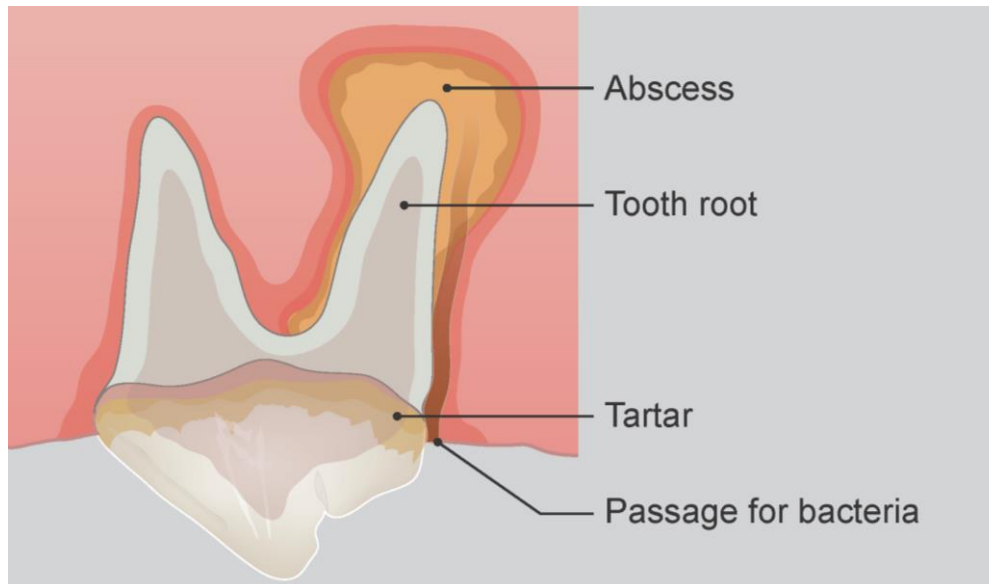
Plaque is a build-up of saliva (spit), food and bacteria; it collects on teeth and eventually turns into a hard, brown substance called tartar. Tartar damages the teeth, causes painful, inflamed gums (gingivitis), and is full of bacteria that can enter the blood cause problems in organs such as the kidneys, heart and liver.

Gingivitis (inflamed gums)



Gingivitis (inflamed gums) is a painful condition usually caused by plaque and tartar build up. It causes the gums to become red, sensitive and bleed easily.

Tooth root abscesses



A tooth root abscess is an infection around a tooth root (see illustration) that develops when bacteria get underneath the gum. Tooth root abscesses are very painful and often cause swelling on the side of the face (just under the eye).

Broken/cracked teeth

Teeth are very solid and don't break easily, however, if they are weakened by dental disease, knocked, or worn down, they can sometimes crack. Always contact your vet if your dog breaks or cracks a tooth - damaged teeth are often extremely painful and vulnerable to infection. We advise against feeding your dog bones because they can cause slab fractures (when a large chunk of tooth break off and exposes the inside of the tooth).

Treatment

Treatment for dental disease depends on the specific problem, but may include:

- **[Anti-inflammatory pain relief.](#)** Your vet may prescribe anti-inflammatory pain relief to make your dog's mouth more comfortable.

- **Antibiotics**. Antibiotics are sometimes (but not always) necessary to fight infection.
- **Dental surgery**. Most dogs with dental disease require some sort of dental surgery. This can range from a simple scale and polish to tooth removal. The only way to safely clean or remove teeth is under general anaesthetic.
- **Doggy mouthwash**. Special dog-safe mouthwash can be added to your dog's drinking water to help keep their mouth clean. Never use human mouthwash for your dog.

Cost

Dental disease can become very expensive. Always speak to your vet if you can't afford the treatment they have recommended, there may be another option. We strongly recommend [insuring your dog](#) as soon as you get him/her so that you are covered for future problems. Always check if your insurance policy covers dental disease.

Find out whether you are eligible for free or low cost PDSA veterinary treatment using our checker below or visit www.pdsa.org.uk/eligibility

Prevention

Daily tooth brushing.

Brushing away plaque before it turns into solid tartar is by-far the best way to prevent dental disease. Check out our video 'How to: brush your dog's teeth'.

Dental toys.

Encourage your dog to chew on dental toys which clean the teeth and gums without causing any damage.

Diet.

Feed your dog a proper diet that needs chewing, not just soft or sugary human food. Feeding some dry biscuits as part of your dog's meal is thought to be slightly better because they physically remove some of the plaque as your dog chews. However, this is no substitute for brushing your dog's teeth.

Check-ups. Regular dental check-ups with your vet will help to spot dental problems before they become serious. A good time for a check is at their annual vaccination/booster.

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