

Tooth and gum disease in dogs

Overview

Tartar build up is by far the most common cause of tooth and gum disease in dogs. If your dog's mouth isn't kept clean, tartar will build up and cause damage to the teeth and gums.

It's very important to keep your dog's teeth clean by brushing them regularly. Dental problems can be very painful and if left untreated can cause other problems around the body such as kidney disease or heart disease.

Most dogs will continue to eat even if they are in pain so it's important to check your dog's mouth regularly to make sure you spot any problems they may be hiding from you.

Your dog should also have their mouths checked by a vet at least once a year (usually at their booster vaccination).

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any problems with your dog's mouth.

Symptoms of dental disease in dogs

- Bad breath
- Eating less or difficulty eating (chewing on one side of the mouth)
- Tartar
- Sore gums (red, inflamed or bleeding)
- Wobbly, missing or broken teeth
- Dribbling
- Preferring soft food to biscuits
- Swollen face

- Pawing at the mouth/face
- Weight loss

When to contact your vet

If you notice any of the symptoms above, it is best to book an appointment with your vet. They will have a good look inside your dog's mouth (which can be very difficult to do at home!)

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Types of dental disease

- Plaque and tartar
- Gingivitis
- Tooth root abscesses
- Damaged teeth

Plaque and tartar

When your dog eats, saliva (and lots of bacteria) form a clear, sticky film over their teeth. This is plaque. If plaque isn't brushed away at the end of the day it turns into a hard, brown substance called tartar. Tartar causes inflammation of the gums (gingivitis). Over time, the gums become more inflamed and the teeth start to become affected. Eventually the tooth will become loose, start to rot and it may even fall out.

This is a very painful process and can make it hard for your dog to eat.

Gums have a very good blood supply. Unfortunately, this means that bacteria from tartar can easily get into the blood stream and be transported around the body, potentially damaging internal organs such as the kidney, heart and liver.



Gingivitis

Gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) is most commonly caused by tartar build up. It can make eating very painful and in severe

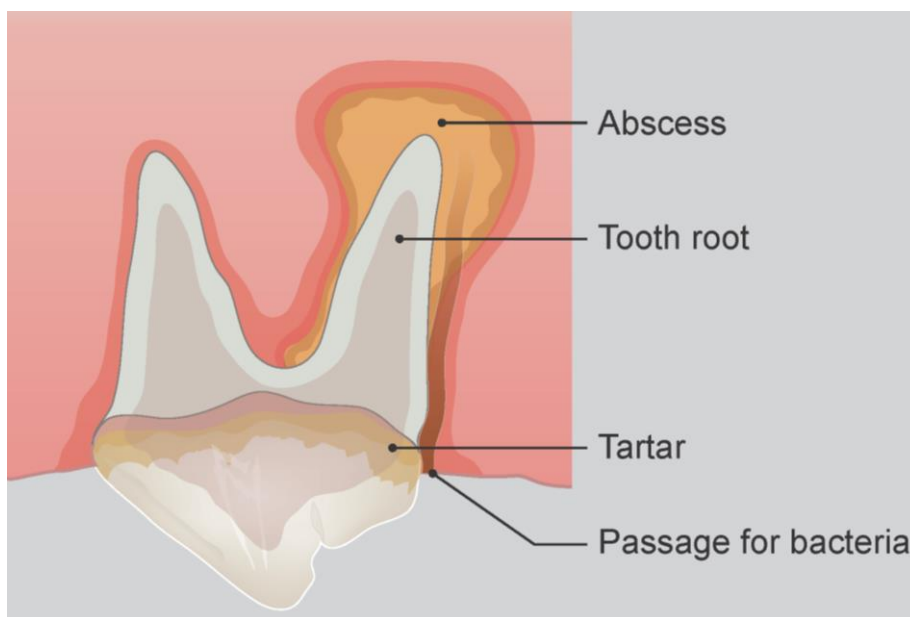


cases it can lead to the whole mouth becoming inflamed (stomatitis).

Tooth root abscesses

Tooth root abscesses are painful balloons of pus that form when there is an infection under the tooth (see illustration). Tooth root abscesses often cause a swelling on the face just under the eye. This swelling will eventually burst and leaks pus.

Tooth root abscesses are very painful and should be treated quickly. Your vet may prescribe antibiotics and in some cases, the infected tooth may need to be removed.



Broken teeth

Although your dog's teeth may seem very hard, they occasionally break if they are weakened by dental disease, if they bump into something or if your dog chews on something hard such as a stone, bone or a hard chew. We advise against feeding bones – they can cause slab fractures in the teeth. Slab fractures are when large chunks of tooth break off and expose the inside of the tooth.

The inside section of the tooth is very sensitive and painful if it's exposed. Once a tooth is damaged, bacteria and food can easily cause infections.

What makes dental disease more likely?

Age

Dental disease can affect a dog of any age. However, it's much more common in older dogs due to wear and tear throughout their lives.

Breed

Some breeds of dog have a tendency to suffer with more dental disease. This is usually to do with the shape of their mouths (i.e. very cramped or narrow) examples include:

- Yorkshire Terriers
- Greyhounds, whippets and other sight hounds
- Pugs, bulldogs, Shih Tzu and other flat faced breeds
- Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

Retained baby teeth

Young puppies have a set of baby teeth that fall out as their adult teeth start to come through. If these baby teeth don't fall out, they can trap food and bacteria making dental problems more likely. Your vet might recommend removing these baby teeth under anaesthetic if they are causing a problem.

Diet

Diet can affect how likely a dog is to get dental problems. Feeding dry biscuits is thought to be slightly better for teeth because they physically remove some of the plaque as your dog chews. However, this is no substitute for brushing your dog's teeth.

Treatment

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

Anti-inflammatory pain relief

Your vet may prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pain relief to make your dog more comfortable.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are sometimes (but not always) necessary to fight infection.

Dental surgery

Unlike a human, a dog won't sit still and open their mouths while we operate in their mouths. The only way to safely clean the teeth or remove rotten, painful teeth is under an anaesthetic.

Doggy mouthwash

Special doggy mouth wash can be added to the water your dog drinks. This helps to keep their mouths as clean as possible. Never use human mouthwash for your dog.

Cost

Dental disease can cost several hundred pounds (this can vary a lot depending on the specific problem). Always speak to your vet if you can't afford the treatment they have recommended, there may be other options.

If you are struggling with veterinary fees, PDSA offers free or reduced cost treatment to eligible clients.

We strongly recommend insuring your pets as soon as you get them so that you are covered for future problems. Always check if your insurance policy covers dental disease.

Prevention

Tooth brushing

Regular tooth brushing is the best way to prevent dental disease. Brushing removes plaque before it turns into solid tartar.

Check ups

Regular dental checks with your vet will also help to stop serious problems developing.

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