

## Dental disease in dogs

### Overview

- Dental (tooth and gum) disease is a very common problem in dogs.
- As well as being painful, dental disease can also cause other problems around the body such as kidney disease and heart disease.
- Poor dental hygiene is by far the most common cause of tooth and gum disease in dogs. Brush your dog's teeth daily to prevent problems developing.
- Most dogs will continue to eat even when they have an uncomfortable mouth, so it's important to check your dog's mouth regularly to make sure you spot any problems before they become more serious.
- Book an appointment with your vet if you notice a problem with your dog's mouth. Your dog should also have their mouth checked by a vet at least once a year.

### General information

The UK is 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 or an unsuitable diet. The dental problems that can develop are:

- Plaque and tartar build up
- Gingivitis
- A tooth root abscess
- A cracked or broken tooth

Here are some factors that make 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 tooth wear and tear throughout their lives.

- **Breed.** Some breeds are much more prone to dental disease than others, often due to the shape of their mouth (i.e. very cramped or narrow). Breeds at risk of dental disease include Yorkshire Terriers, Greyhounds, Whippets (and other sight hounds), Pugs, Bulldogs, Shih Tzu (and other flat faced breeds) and the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.
- **Diet.** 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.
- **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.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of dental disease in dogs include:

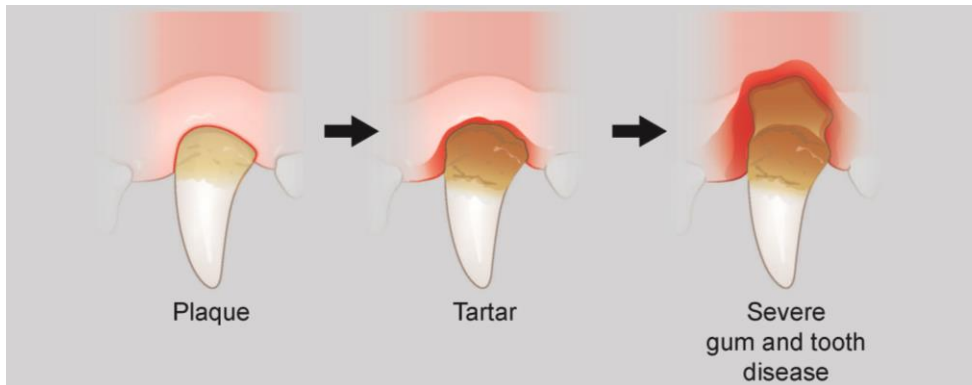
- Halitosis (bad breath)
- Pain or difficulty eating i.e. chewing on one side of the mouth
- Weight loss
- Tartar
- Red, inflamed, bleeding gums
- Wobbly, missing or broken teeth
- Excessive drooling
- Preferring soft food to biscuits
- A swelling on the face (can indicate a tooth root abscess)
- Pawing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

## When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with 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 soft build-up of saliva, food and bacteria; it collects on teeth and eventually turns into a hard, brown substance called tartar. Tartar causes gingivitis (painful, inflamed gums) which eventually starts to damage the teeth, cause them to wobble, rot and hurt. As well as affecting the gums and teeth, tartar is full of bacteria that can sometimes enter the blood stream and travel to internal organs such as the kidney, heart and liver.

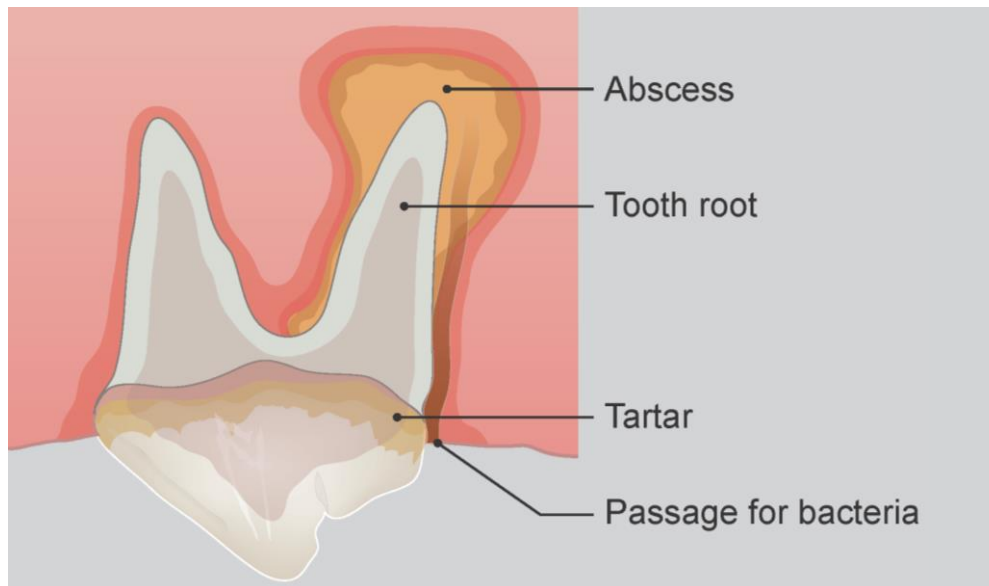
## Gingivitis (inflamed gums)



Gingivitis (inflamed gums) causes, red, painful, sensitive gums that bleed easily. Gingivitis is caused by plaque and tartar build up.

## Tooth root abscesses

A tooth root abscess is a collection of pus around a tooth root (see illustration) that develops when bacteria get underneath the gum.



Tooth root abscesses are very painful and often cause a swelling on one side of the face just under the eye. Your vet may prescribe antibiotics and in some cases, the infected tooth may need to be removed.

## Broken/cracked teeth

Broken teeth aren't very common, and generally only occur when they have been weakened by dental disease, knocked or been worn down by hard objects such as stones or bones. The inside of a tooth is very sensitive because it contains nerves. Always book an appointment with your vet if your dog breaks or cracks a tooth because damaged teeth are 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 non-steroidal 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](http://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.

**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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