

Gehrman Animal Hospital recommends your pet have a dental cleaning. This is based on the oral disease we have identified in your pet's mouth. Additionally, you may have noticed that your pet has bad breath, which is likely related to periodontal disease. Dental health is an important part of every pet's well-being and overall health. What exactly is a professional dental cleaning? What does it involve?

About Professional Dental Cleaning

Much like your own routine visits to the dentist, a professional dental cleaning involves thorough scaling of the teeth, close inspection of the teeth, gums and mouth and polishing of the teeth. However, one cannot expect a pet to open wide and say "ahh." No pet will let people tinker around in their mouth with water and metal tools. Therefore, general anesthesia is necessary to do a proper dental cleaning and complete oral examination.

Before the Dental Cleaning

We will be placing your pet under general anesthesia for a teeth cleaning. Prior to doing so, we need to make sure your pet is a healthy candidate for anesthesia. Therefore, we require preanesthetic lab work before a dental cleaning. Normal lab results assure your vet that anesthesia poses the lowest risk possible. Abnormal lab results will let your vet know that anesthesia protocols need adjustment, or that it may not be safe to use anesthesia on your pet at all. This will also allow your vet to begin treatment for health issues caught early, before your pet feels ill.

Dental Anesthesia

Once lab results have been obtained for anesthesia, a "pre-medication" will be given to bring on some relaxation and pain management before intravenous catheter placement. An intravenous catheter allows us to deliver drugs and intravenous fluids to your pet during the procedure. When your pet's cleaning is about to begin, an anesthetic drug will be injected, causing your pet to fall asleep quickly. Next, a breathing tube is placed through your pet's mouth into the trachea. This tube ensures an open airway during the procedure through which oxygen and anesthetic gas can be delivered. It also prevents liquids and bacteria in the mouth from entering the airway. During the procedure, your pet's anesthesia level will be maintained and adjusted as needed. In addition, all vital signs will be closely monitored (including heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure and temperature).

The Dental Cleaning

Veterinary technicians typically perform the dental cleaning, much like a dental hygienist will clean your teeth. We will begin the procedure with full mouth radiographs (x-rays). This allows the veterinarian to assess the health of the tooth roots, not just the visible portion of the tooth. We can only see 40% of the tooth above the gum line, the remaining portion of the tooth is below the gum line and under the gingival tissue. It is often that we identify abscesses/infection and diseased roots when radiographs are performed. Next, the dental plaque and tartar are removed using hand tools and an ultrasonic scaler. A special periodontal scaler is used to clean along and just under the gum line, where oral bacteria does the most damage.

After scaling is complete, the technician will use a periodontal probe to look for signs of periodontal disease and any other abnormalities. The veterinarian will review the radiographs and visually examine the mouth. If no extractions or special treatments are needed, the technician will go on to polish the teeth with a rubber tipped rotary polishing tool and paste (again, just like a dental hygienist does). Polishing is necessary to prevent tartar from collecting in the grooves that were scaled. Finally, the mouth is rinsed and dried.

Dental Extractions

In some cases, your veterinarian will determine that one or more teeth are diseased and must be removed. This includes teeth that are loose, fractured, infected or otherwise unhealthy. Tooth extractions may be fast and simple, especially if the tooth is already loose. However, dental extractions are often an extensive surgical procedure that requires creating an incision along the gingival tissue and sectioning the multi-rooted tooth and removing the tooth. The area is then cleaned thoroughly before placing sutures (stitches), which are dissolvable, so they do not require removal.

Post-operative care

Once your pet has woken up from anesthesia we remove your pet's IV catheter and monitor your animal closely throughout the day. At the time of your check-out we will recommend specific care for your pet at home. If your pet had teeth extracted, we usually recommend soft food for the next 10-14 days. We recommend soaking your pet's kibble or offering canned food. We may send your pet home with anti-inflammatory pain medication and/or antibiotics based on the procedure. We will also recommend products for you to use at home for your pet to maintain a healthy mouth.

The Cost of a Professional Dental Cleaning

The cost of a professional dental cleaning depends on the amount of dental work your pet needs. Be aware that extractions and special treatments will add to the overall cost, sometimes by several hundred dollars.

The cost may seem like a lot, but most pet owners and experts agree that in the long run, it is money well spent. Dental disease can lead to significant pain and many systemic health problems in pets, such as heart and kidney diseases. Let's do what we can to keep our pets healthy!