

ORAH Info:

Dental care for your pet



“Doggy breath” is not normal! Your pet’s oral health plays a major role in his overall health and well-being. An unhealthy mouth is a source of infection to the whole body. When dental disease is present, bacteria in the mouth can enter the blood stream and settle anywhere in the body, most commonly the heart valves or the kidneys. Tooth and gum disease can also be quite painful. Keeping your pet’s mouth in good shape is as important as any other aspect of your pet’s health care.

THE ORAL EXAM

Examination is the key to diagnosing dental problems and helps determine the type of treatment needed. Here is what we look at during a physical exam:

Breath: Is there halitosis (bad breath)? This is usually caused by gum disease or damaged teeth.

Gums: Is there redness, inflammation, swelling, or recession? This is an indication of periodontal disease, which can destroy tooth-supporting bone, cause bleeding, be painful, and even lead to tooth loss if left untreated.

Teeth: Teeth are examined for tartar accumulation, chips, fractures, and other defects such as cavities, resorptive lesions, or pulp exposure. These defects can be a source of pain for your pet, and they can lead to infections of the tooth root, which can be dangerous.

Blood Work: Blood testing is an excellent tool for evaluating systems in the body that can be affected by dental disease. We recommend blood work to check baseline kidney, liver, blood glucose, and electrolyte levels. This helps us assess the kidneys and liver, two organs which are essential to your pet’s well-being. These organs help to cleanse the blood and are needed for processing anesthetics and medications. The knowledge gained from blood work is very important for designing the treatment plan for your pet.

THE TREATMENT PLAN AND SCHEDULING

When the doctor has had a chance to do a general assessment of your pet’s mouth and overall health, she will develop a treatment care plan based on your pet’s individual needs. A technician will review the plan with you, give you an estimate of the cost, and assist you with scheduling the dental procedure. The vet’s recommendation as to the timing of the procedure is based on your pet’s health and comfort level.

THE DENTAL PROCEDURE

In the morning, you and your pet will come to an admission appointment. A technician will review the treatment care plan with you and respond to any concerns you may have. Your pet will be admitted and placed in a cozy cage or run with a fleece to rest on.

Next, we will perform a recheck physical exam, review your pet's medical record, and evaluate any pre-anesthetic blood work that you have chosen. We will contact you if we have any concerns. You are also welcomed to contact us throughout the day, as needed.

The first anesthetic agent we use provides relaxation, pain control, and cardiac support. Then we can safely and comfortably place your animal's intravenous catheter, which provides access for the initial sedation and fluid therapy during the procedure. Having an IV catheter in place allows us to swiftly administer emergency medication, in the unlikely event that it is needed.

Next, we induce anesthesia tailored to the specific patient. We use just enough of these agents for the patient to gently fall asleep and permit us to place a breathing tube into the trachea (windpipe). This tube provides oxygen and anesthetic gas to the patient during the procedure. It also protects the trachea and lungs so no fluid can be inhaled while the patient is asleep. We then start administration of IV fluids (which continues throughout the procedure) and attach our vital-signs monitoring equipment. We watch your pet's oxygen levels, pulse, heart rate, and blood pressure during the entire procedure. Your pet is also given injections of an antibiotic to provide immediate bacterial control and a pain medication for long-lasting comfort.

We begin the dental procedure by scaling and polishing the teeth. Our ultrasonic scaler removes the tar and calculus from the teeth and from below the gum line. Polishing smooths the tooth surface and helps to prevent plaque from adhering to the tooth in the future. After the teeth are cleaned we perform a full mouth examination. We probe every tooth and check for pockets between the tooth and gums. We use our state-of-the-art digital dental x-ray machine to evaluate the root systems and bone surrounding the teeth.

In veterinary dentistry, the most common treatment of diseased teeth is extraction. If extraction is needed, we lift up the gums around the tooth and use a high-speed drill to section the tooth for easier removal. Once the tooth has been removed, we clean the tooth socket and burr away any rough or diseased bone. Finally, we close the extraction site with absorbable suture to reduce pain and promote rapid healing.

When the procedure is finished, your pet is taken off gas anesthesia and recovered with oxygen. Once she is alert and responsive, we will contact you with an update on the procedure. Your pet should be ready to go home later in the afternoon. At your scheduled appointment time a technician will review the specifics of the procedure, the post-dental care instructions, and the recommended preventative care options. We typically send home oral pain medication for you to administer for the next 48 hours, and if there were any extractions, we send home antibiotics as well.

Keeping your pet's mouth healthy is important to us. If you have any questions, we'd be happy to discuss them with you.