

Doggie Breath

Dental Care for Dogs...Really?

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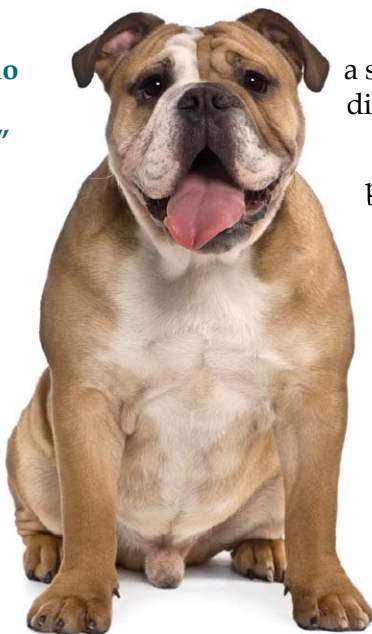
For us baby boomers who were big fans of the TV show "Hill Street Blues," back in the '80s, some of cops' wisecracks made it into the vernacular. "Dog's breath" became the catch-all phrase for anyone who crossed us.

But in the pet world "dog's breath" is much more than a gibe. Dogs and cats with halitosis could actually have a serious disease. In fact, dental disease is the most common infectious disease of our beloved pets.

The disease begins with soft plaque building up on the teeth and around the gums. Dog and cat owners often observe the buildup as a yellow, brown or black substance collecting on their pet's teeth – the same as human plaque.

Dental plaque irritates the gums which causes inflammation, bleeding—and bad breath. As the plaque accumulates, minerals in the mouth begin to form hard tartar (calculus) which often leads to infection and decay of the bone surrounding the teeth.

Your pet could experience pain and eventually lose its teeth. Plus bacteria overload in the body can result in heart and kidney disease. So if your dog has foul breath odor, don't ignore it. It could be



a sign of a serious disease.

Sometimes I see patients and the dog has bad breath but the pet owner says, "It's just doggie breath." They think it is benign. But think about it: you brush your teeth at least once a day to get rid of bacteria and to freshen your breath.

Canines and felines generally go for years without any teeth cleaning. It's hard to imagine what our teeth, mouth and eventually organs would be like if we didn't brush for three years...perish the thought!

The good news is most dental disease is preventable, reversible or treatable through pet dental therapy and regular home care. It is never too late to start brushing your pet's teeth, however, once calculus has formed, it cannot be removed with a toothbrush. The recommended treatment is to have your pet examined by a veterinarian, followed by a professional dental cleaning under anesthesia, which includes scaling and polishing of all surfaces of the teeth.

Now a lot of pet owners are

reluctant to give their pets general anesthesia. And it's a natural concern I hear from many pet owners when I recommend dental treatment. However, it is just simply not possible to safely or humanely perform dental therapy on a dog or cat patient that is awake.

Plus, the risk of chronic oral infection is far greater than the risk of an anesthetic procedure. But rest assured, anesthesia is very low risk, even in geriatric pets. We actually draw blood from the patient before we do a procedure to make sure your pet is healthy and it is safe to administer anesthesia.



Lisa Dean with her Bostons.

We also use an anesthetic monitor that tells us exactly what is happening while your pet is under so we can address any anomalies that may show up.

Following professional dental therapy, routine home care is recommended for your pet. These