



# SCOTTISH TERRIER CLUB OF AMERICA

## Proper Dental Care

VETERINARY NEWS

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Pets are living longer and experiencing more dental and oral disease. Experts around the country warn that dental disease is the most common problem in the pet population, while its care is one of the most neglected areas of pet health today. Owners and veterinarians can work together to insure healthy teeth and gums in their dogs. As with humans, this requires lifelong attention - the best time to start treatment is during a puppy's first examination.

Vets recommend bringing pets in one or two times per year for professional teeth cleaning, which usually involves scaling - removal of the built-up calculus and plaque around the tooth using a hand scaler or an ultrasonic tip - followed by polishing. In most cases, the dog will be placed under general anesthesia for the cleaning. Afterward, the owner should flush the dog's mouth with a special rinse once a day for two weeks.

For home dental care, a soft toothbrush or cloth should be used to remove plaque once a week. Baking soda and water or specialized pastes for dogs should be used - never human toothpaste, which can upset a dog's stomach. Changing a dog's diet to include more dry dog food, kibble, dog biscuits and rawhide chew bones can help to reduce plaque and calculus build-up.

A symptom of periodontal disease is halitosis in an otherwise healthy dog. In a dog suffering from infection and pain, eating can be affected and weight loss may occur. Also, since the teeth have a direct connection with the sinuses, oral-nasal fistulas as well as chronic tonsillitis may develop. A dog in pain may begin to display aggressive behavior or withdraw, making it difficult to handle as well.

Besides gingivitis, inherited dental abnormalities can cause occlusion and chewing problems, which only worsen if left untreated. Dogs with teeth chipped as a result of accident or injury are susceptible to bacteria and infection entering the tooth. Root canal therapy may be necessary to block it off.

Tetracycline antibiotics administered to puppies can cause a permanent discoloration of their tooth enamel: a pregnant bitch may pass that antibiotic on to her pups, who may then be born with discolored teeth. (Consult your veterinarian before administering tetracycline to pregnant bitches or puppies.) Luckily, cavities are not a common problem in dogs, nor are dogs adversely affected by tooth extractions.

The majority of dental problems can be prevented or minimized by regular at-home care and visits to the veterinarian. (*Animal Health Newsletter*, Volume 6, Number 10.)

*Editor's note: There are cases where necessary dental procedures might require disqualification from the show and obedience rings. Even if such procedures as braces to correct a bite, caps or bonding to repair a broken tooth, etc., are recommended by a veterinarian in order to protect the health of a dog, they would also have the effect of changing the dog's appearance, possibly improving it, and making it impossible for a judge to evaluate the dog on its natural condition. Some breed standards also call for the faulting or disqualification of a dog with missing teeth, which would be applicable regardless of why the teeth were removed.*