

Professional Veterinary Dental Cleanings

When you have your teeth cleaned you're present for the whole procedure. Since that isn't the case for your pet, you may be wondering what happens during your pet's dentistry procedure. Firstly, you need to be aware this is not just a dental cleaning. It is a dental cleaning, assessment, diagnosis and treatment of dental disease all in one. Here are the steps involved in a professional veterinary dentistry:

- We start with an oral exam at least 4 days prior to the teeth cleaning. During this time we examine your pet's teeth & determine how involved the cleaning and treatment may be. We examine your pet's heart & lungs and check over the rest of the body to determine if any other problems exist. Based on these findings & your pet's history we determine which lab tests are necessary to ensure the appropriate anesthetic is used. If problems show up on the lab results, the teeth cleaning may be delayed until these are addressed or the anesthetic protocols may be modified. If your pet has a very inflamed or infected mouth they may be placed on antibiotics prior to the teeth cleaning.
- On the day of the dental procedure your pet will receive an anesthetic. It's not possible to do proper teeth cleaning and a diagnostic assessment on an awake pet. Treatment would also be impossible. Your pet will receive a sedative, pain killer and heart protective medication prior to the anesthetic. They then go under an anesthetic. A tube is placed in their airway to provide 100% oxygen mixed with an anesthetic gas. This protects the airway. Your pet is monitored with a machine that checks the oxygen level in the blood, the pulse, the blood pressure & the heart's electrical activity (ECG). Anesthetics have improved greatly during the last 15 years and are constantly becoming safer. The anesthetic risk is much lower now than even a few years ago. If you have questions on anesthetic risk, please ask us.
- Your pet will receive intra-operative IV fluids to help support the organs & blood pressure and counteract the effects of the very dry oxygen (all moisture must be removed from oxygen to compress the air).
- Your pet's body temperature will drop during anesthesia. He/she will receive temperature support through external supplemental heat & the warming of the IV fluids.
- Your pet's mouth will have a full set of dental x-rays, just like when you go to the dentist. About 40% of tooth pathology, or disease, is not visible to the eye. Without dental x-rays we will miss many potential oral health problems.
- Now we get to the teeth cleaning! The worst of the calculus & tartar is removed with an ultrasonic scaler. Then the teeth are cleaned just under the gum line. This is where the most damage to the gums from tartar & calculus occur. The teeth are coated with a disclosing solution to find any hidden plaque or tartar. Each tooth is probed to look for pockets & enamel damage. It takes between 1 to 2 hours to properly clean all the teeth.

- If necessary, teeth may be extracted. If greater than 70% of the tooth attachment is lost, the tooth is extracted. If the teeth have roots exposed that allow debris to be trapped under them they are extracted. Many cat & dog teeth have multiple roots which need to be split and the individual roots removed one at a time. This can be challenging. Remember that the root can be 3-5 x the size of the crown!
- If dental or gum surgery is needed your pet will receive a dental block. This is a local anesthetic similar to what your dentist uses when he fills a cavity. The main difference is that our dental blocks last longer and will continue to be effective until most nerve inflammation has ceased, thereby providing greater pain control.
- Next, the teeth are polished to smooth out any ridges and slow the rate by which plaque & tartar can attach.
- The likelihood of pain is assessed and more pain medications may be given or sent home with your pet.
- Your pet's recovery will be monitored throughout the day. Of particular concern is their level of discomfort. If for any reason we suspect your pet may be painful we will provide additional pain killers.
- We'll schedule a discharge time with you. One of our staff members will review the results of your pet's teeth cleaning with you & discuss their care after the dental. They will also review the tools you may use to limit the frequency of teeth cleanings.
- Follow-up exams of the gums and/or radiographs may be needed after the teeth cleaning to ensure proper healing. These are included in your dental package.