



## What can I expect for my pet's dental procedure?

### Why is professional dental care important? How will it help my pet?

Dental disease affects the vast majority of veterinary patients. They can't brush their own teeth, and they can't tell us when a tooth hurts. Dogs and cats will continue to eat even if they have painful teeth because they don't have a choice – they have to eat to live. Tartar on the teeth harbor billions of bacteria, which affect oral health, and cause inflammation that taxes the entire body's immune system. Cats are particularly prone to "feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions," also called "FORLs," which are painful and aggressive cavities that consume the tooth, exposing roots and nerves. It's not understood what causes FORLs, and so we don't know how to stop or prevent them, but we know that affected teeth are very painful and need to be removed. Dental care is all about your pet's comfort and quality of life.

### Are the teeth bad because of the food I feed? Is it my fault?

It is not your fault! The biggest factor for an individual's oral health is genetics. Some breeds, such as small dogs and some cats are simply much more prone to aggressive dental disease. There isn't a strong correlation between the type of food fed and the degree of dental disease, although food and appropriate chews can help somewhat.

### Why do animals need to be anesthetized to have their teeth cleaned?

Pets cannot and do not cooperate like people do for dental cleanings. They often have painful teeth, which makes cooperation even more difficult. Anesthesia allows us to keep your pet pain free, get a good look inside the mouth, protect their airway from all the fluid with an anesthetic endotracheal tube, take good quality oral X-rays, and extract teeth if necessary. It allows us to clean underneath the gum line and assess for hidden problems. "Non-anesthetized dental cleanings" can't do any of this and are actually painful and detrimental for your pet.

### I'm concerned about anesthesia...

We are too!! There is no 100% risk-free anesthesia and it is important to recognize this. However, if taken seriously, with close monitoring and attention to detail, the risks of anesthesia can be vastly minimized. At Mt. Tabor, we take a lot of precautions to help keep your pet as safe as possible. Within three months of the procedure, we will need a pre-op appointment to assess their risk, draw blood, examine the mouth, and discuss expectations. Pre-anesthetic labwork must be current within three months of anesthesia. If there are cardiac concerns, pre-op cardiac enzyme testing, chest X-rays, EKG, or a consultation with a cardiologist will be discussed. A good exam the day of anesthesia allows us to listen to the heart and lungs and assess overall health and candidacy for anesthesia. We always place an IV catheter, run appropriate IV fluids to maintain blood pressure, and monitor closely, and we use the lowest possible doses of modern anesthetic medications – similar to those used in human pediatrics. We also have the option of recommending a board-certified veterinary anesthesiologist for high-risk cases.

### What can I expect the day of the procedure?

Please do not feed your pet anything the morning of the procedure. Water is okay. Please arrive between 8:00-8:15am. Your pet will spend the day with us in a comfortable kennel or tethered in the treatment area. Everyone receives individualized attention and is housed in a way that is most comfortable for them. Special arrangements can be made for pets who are highly stressed in the clinic – please let us know if your pet gets very anxious here. When it is your pet's turn, he or she is given a sedative, the IV catheter is placed, and anesthesia induced. First an oral assessment and cleaning is done. Full mouth X-rays help us assess roots underneath the gumline – often there are surprises that we cannot see with the naked eye that might lead to additional recommendations to maximize comfort. We always try to save teeth if we can. However, if the doctor assesses that there are painful teeth that need to be removed, she will call you to go over what we've found, what is recommended, and the estimated cost *prior* to proceeding further. Your pet will be under anesthesia while we make this phone call. Therefore, **it is EXTREMELY important that you be readily available by phone during the day.** If you are not available, the doctor will need to make a decision without your express permission. If you know ahead of time that you will not be available, please let us know your wishes if troublesome teeth are found. This is detailed on the anesthetic consent form that you will sign the day of the procedure.

### **What can I expect for cost? Why does it vary so much?**

Pre-anesthetic examination and labwork ranges from \$170-\$350, depending on the profile you choose with the doctor. The basic dental cleaning, including the anesthetic precautions, cleaning, assessment, and X-rays costs around \$550 for cats, \$600-\$650 for small and medium dogs, and \$750- \$800 for large dogs. If we find troublesome teeth, the cost can vary significantly, as extractions are charged based on the time needed – this varies a lot! Although we can get a general idea of the condition of the mouth on a conscious exam, it's impossible to completely assess oral health on an awake patient. Sometimes we are surprised – pleasantly or unpleasantly – by the condition of the mouth after complete assessment. **Extractions can increase the cost of the procedure to \$1000 up to \$2000+ if complicated work is needed.**

### **What if my pet loses a lot of teeth? How will he or she eat?**

We always try to save teeth if we can. If a root canal or periodontal therapy is an option, we will discuss that with you and offer referral to a dental specialist. However, if a tooth is painful and cannot be saved, then the best option for your pet's comfort is to remove it. Even though the tooth is lost, the PAIN IS GONE. Many pets actually eat better after losing painful teeth. We often hear stories about a pet "coming to life" and feeling so much happier after extraction of painful teeth. Occasionally, after extensive extractions, pets will prefer softened food over dry food, but many toothless pets eat dry food without problems. Remember, it is all about your pet's comfort and quality of life.

### **What can I expect for home care afterwards? Will my pet be in pain?**

We will go over post-operative recommendations in detail. If your pet didn't need extractions, he or she shouldn't be in any discomfort, but may feel woozy or disoriented for several hours after anesthesia. When we perform extractions, we always numb the mouth so they don't feel anything for 8-12 hours, and give injectable pain medications in the clinic. Then we follow-up with oral pain medications sent home. Often patients feel much better right away, as the pain from the tooth is gone, and now they are healing. Soft food for 7 days is necessary to allow for the gums to heal. The stitches are absorbable and will fall out on their own. If your pet is uncomfortable, drooling excessively for several days after the procedure, or has a foul smell, please let us know. Fortunately, complications from extractions are uncommon.

### **How often do pets need professional dental care?**

This varies from pet to pet. Again, genetics play a large role in how quickly tartar builds up after a cleaning. If you are able (and your pet is willing) to do brushing and home care afterwards, often the interval for professional dental care can be extended. We will give tips on toothbrushing and home dental care. However, some animals need professional dental care every year or even every 6 months. The goal is to stay on top of dental disease and treat things preventatively. If we can clean teeth before disease progresses, then damage is reversible, comfort is maintained, teeth are saved, and money is saved too.

### **What if I decide not to have my pet's teeth cleaned? What are my options aside from professional dental care?**

This is a difficult question to answer. We assume that dental disease is painful because we speculate based on our own experiences. It is difficult to appreciate oral discomfort when a pet is acting so "normal." Dental changes happen gradually, so it's hard to recognize the discomfort. If the dental disease is mild enough, then home brushing and appropriate chew toys can help. However, sometimes dental disease is so significant that we simply cannot fully address it without anesthesia and removing diseased teeth. In these cases, home brushing can be very painful and shouldn't be done. Antibiotics can help in the short term, but they are not a long-term solution. They are a short-term bridge until abscessed teeth can be extracted. However, if dental cleaning is truly not possible due to severe anesthetic risk or financial restrictions, then sometimes we will "pulse dose" antibiotics, give pain medications as needed, and feed soft food to help decrease discomfort associated with eating.

**Remember:** Dental care for animals is not about cosmetics – it is all about your pet's comfort and quality of life! We want your pet to be happy, healthy, and pain-free for years to come.