



CAT CHAT

Autumn 2004

WESTSIDE HOSPITAL FOR CATS

www.westsidehospitalforcats.com

Cats Need Dental Cleanings, Too!



A cat grows two sets of teeth during its lifetime. The first set comprises 26 deciduous teeth, otherwise known as milk teeth. They start to appear when a kitten is about four weeks old, and by six weeks of age or so, the full complement is present. By the time the kitten is six months old, the deciduous teeth will have fallen out and been replaced by 30 permanent teeth—tailor-made by Mother Nature for catching prey, ripping it to pieces and chewing it up. They're useful, also, for self-defense.

The term permanent, however, isn't quite accurate, since a sizable portion of the adult cat population will eventually lose one or more of their teeth as the result of injury or disease. And in many cases, the problem can be treated only by extraction of an affected tooth, if not several.

To some degree, genetics play a role in determining which cats are more susceptible than others to dental disease. But the overriding cause of dental problems can be traced to the modern cat's diet. Cats are carnivores. Their teeth are meant to be kept strong and clean by chewing up the flesh and bones of birds, rodents and other prey. Today, the cat subsists basically on a diet of the mush that we feed them. We, inadvertently, are setting our cats up for serious dental problems.

Four types of feline dental disease make up the vast majority of problems. They are:

1) Periodontal Disease. The most common feline dental disease, this affects an estimated 85% of cats over the age of six. Layers of plaque accumulate and harden on the tooth surface. Bacterial poisons and enzymes from the plaque eventually

prompt an inflammatory response in the gums that, if left untreated, leads to severe inflammation (gingivitis).

2) Feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions (FORL). Affecting an estimated 50% of cats, this disease is relatively common also. This disease is characterized by plaque-caused lesions that start in the bone tissue just below the enamel. Due to an inappropriate immune-system response, the tissue is unable to rebuild itself, and the lesions can progress rapidly and damage the tooth in which FORL has extended to the point at which lesions pose a threat to the pulp chamber and must be extracted.

3) Feline gingivitis / stomatitis syndrome (FGS). This condition occurs in about 1% of cats (most frequently those with feline leukemia virus or feline immunodeficiency virus) or cats with other viral, nutritional, or hormonal conditions. Although antibiotics and steroid therapy may be helpful in some cases, extraction of most or all teeth may be the only treatment option.

4) Fractured teeth. Fractured teeth may occur as the result of trauma or, less commonly, through chewing. Doing nothing can leave a broken tooth that is painful and a possible avenue for infection.

Keep in mind that your cat may not always show when he or she is having symptoms of dental problems, which can lead to health problems throughout the cat's body. Cats are descended from wild animals, and it is very deeply ingrained in them that if they show signs of weakness, they may become prey themselves. However, watch out for your cat if they have bad breath, red and swollen gums, pawing at the mouth, or they refuse to eat hard food.

The only way to really find out what's going on in a cat's mouth is to examine the animal's teeth under general anesthesia and, if necessary, take x-rays.

Following these "Three D's" can help in the prevention of dental disease:

Daily Brushing: Clean your cat's teeth with a toothbrush once a day. Most people don't want to do this, but it's the best of all preventative measures.

Diet: There are cat foods on the market today that are shown to reduce plaque and tartar by 50%. Ask your veterinarian for a recommendation.

Dentistry: Take your cat in once or twice a year (depending upon the cat's age) for a professional cleaning and examination.

For more information, call Westside Hospital for Cats at 310-479-2428. ☎

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10 Ways to Tell if Your Cat is in Crisis

Everyone's heard the old adage that cats have nine lives. And while your cat may be tough, you don't want to actually put that theory to the test. Getting your cat to the veterinarian in time to save his or her life may depend on your ability to identify signs of serious injury or disease. Some signs may be obvious, but cats are masters of hiding their injuries or illnesses.

So, how do you know when you actually have a cat emergency on your hands? A good rule of thumb is to always err on the



side of caution. Most concerns are at least worth a phone call to your veterinarian.

To help you decipher when your cat may be in crisis, here are ten signs that may be indicative of a medical emergency:

1) Trauma: If your cat has fallen, been mauled by a dog, or hit by a car, call your veterinarian even if the cat appears to be alright.

2) Straining in the litter box: Your cat may be constipated, but straining without elimination of urine or feces may indicate something even more serious, such as urethral obstruction.

3) Eye problems: Is your cat squinting, tearing, or holding his/her eye shut? This may indicate a medical problem like an ulcer, or an injury to the eye like a puncture wound.

4) Breathing difficulties: Rapid or labored breathing can indicate a true medical emergency.

5) Seizures: A seizure of more than one minute in duration may be life threatening. Call your veterinarian immediately, even if the seizure is brief.

6) Loss of consciousness: Clearly a potentially life-threatening situation that requires immediate attention.

7) Lameness: Sudden-onset-lameness may be the result of injury, poisoning, or possibly a serious heart ailment called cardiomyopathy, a disorder of the heart muscle that may lead to blood clot formation and heart failure.

8) Vomiting and diarrhea: Repeated vomiting within a short period of time can be caused by a gastrointestinal obstruction or poisoning.

9) Skin wounds: Wounds from visible injury, either lacerations or puncture wounds, should be treated as soon as possible.

10) Hemorrhaging: Heavy bleeding may result from injury, disease, or from ingestion of poison. Cats who have eaten rat poison experience profuse nosebleeds, and may bleed under the skin - causing swellings, or in the joints - causing lameness. Blood in feces, urine, or vomit can be signs of serious disease. 🚑

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10. Hemorrhaging



WESTSIDE HOSPITAL FOR CATS WELCOMES DR. RACHEL ADDLEMAN

Westside Hospital for Cats is proud to announce that Dr. Rachel Addleman has joined our veterinary team. Come in and say hello. Or, to schedule an appointment, call 310-479-2428.



WESTSIDE HOSPITAL FOR CATS
2317 Cotner Avenue, West Los Angeles, CA 90064
Tel: 310-479-2428 • Fax: 310-479-4208
www.westsidehospitalforcats.com



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