

Vets offer tips to help furry friends take
a bite out of tooth decay

Chew on this

By SARAH WEBSTER
STAFF WRITER

Dr. Peter Falk at Ocean County Veterinary Hospital says animals do a very good job of masking pain.

They may have discomfort but it's not always demonstrated, Falk said. Most of the time, their owners aren't paying much attention to them while they eat, he added.

As a result pets may favor chewing on one side, they may stop eating hard treats and/or biscuits, and they may not play as much, Falk said. Other thing owners may notice is a lack of interest in eating.

They may mosey over to their food only to turn around and walk away. Or they may eat just enough or eat in an irregular fashion, Falk said.

February is National Pet Dental Health Month and veterinarians at Ocean County Veterinary Hospital in Lakewood and Fischer Veterinary Hospital in Toms River are both celebrating the occasion by providing free dental health screenings for pets.

Owners are invited to bring their pet to one of the hospitals from 2 to 3 p.m. every Saturday during February for a brief check of the pet's overall dental health.

A veterinarian will provide a dental report card and plan for optimal health, said Tori Lattig, administrative assistant at Ocean County Veterinary Hospital.

Although it's important to be aware that dental health should go on all year round, it's equally important to educate clients on how to maintain dental health, Falk said.

When pets have diseased teeth,

it can increase the amount of bacteria in the mouth and cause it to enter into the bloodstream. As a consequence, pets are susceptible to heart disease, liver disease and other infections throughout the body, he said.

"This can become dangerous if the bacterium goes into the blood stream," said Dr. Michael Yurkus at Middletown Veterinary Hospital. "It can go into the heart and cause bacterial endocarditis, which is extremely dangerous and life threatening. If a tooth gets bad enough — just like in a person — you can get an infected tooth or an infected tooth root; it can form an abscess and cause the face to swell up like a balloon."

As a result, the tooth may need to be pulled. That can be painful for a pet, Yurkus said.

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A mouthful of bacteria and bleeding gums is an indication of established periodontal disease. However, periodontal disease is easy to prevent. Comprehensive dental care, oral assessment and treatment by the veterinarian at least annually and daily prevention at home helps to ensure a healthy pet, according to a Greenies news release.

A study conducted by the American Animal Hospital Association revealed approximately two-thirds of pet owners do not provide the dental care that is recommended as essential by veterinarians.

There are approximately

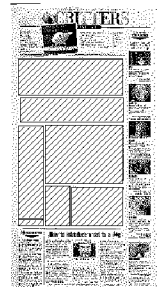
80 million dogs and 90 million cats in the United States. Only 5 percent of them get annual oral care by a veterinarian, and about 160 million pets do not receive any oral care. Many veterinary dentists believe good oral health can increase a pet's life span, according to Greenies.

More than 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats develop gum disease by the age of 3, according to the American Veterinary Dental Society.

"Bad breath is not normal," Falk said. "Bad breath is a sign of something — whether it's dental disease or something else — it's not normal, and that pet should be taken to a veterinarian that can make an assessment."

Because pets in the early stages of periodontal disease seem healthy, it's easy to overlook bad breath, discolored teeth and reddish gums. But what you can't see can hurt your pet, said **Dr. Jan Bellows**, a veterinary dental specialist. Soft plaque builds up on teeth at the gum line. Bacteria live in the plaque, irritating the gums, she said in a news release.

Sometimes, animals may have dental disease and the owners may not even be aware of it. There may be facial swelling or a lump underneath the eye, and that could just be the root of a tooth being ab-



scessed, Falk said. Anything around the head can be related to dental disease, he added.

Some pets begin to lose weight and owners have no idea why, Falk said. It may be a result of the animal having bad teeth and it hurts to eat, he said.

Also, people sometimes have misconceptions with dry food. People often make an assessment and think that dry food is better than canned food for dental health in dogs and cats, Falk said. When an animal bites into dry food,

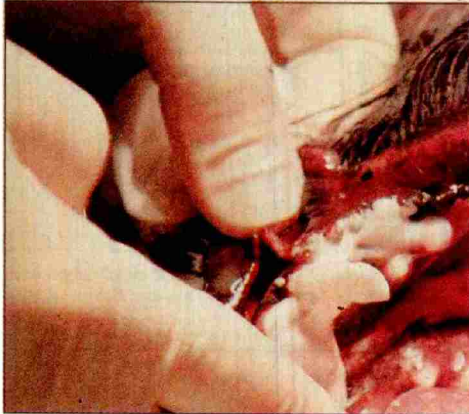
it really just explodes into crumbs and is not as abrasive as we think.

So, even though there may be a slight advantage to dry food vs. canned food, that doesn't substitute for regular dental care, Falk said.

Pets coming in to Ocean County Veterinary Hospital or Fischer Veterinary Hospital for a screening will receive a goodie bag of free dental health product samples. In addition, the hospitals are offering 10 percent off all purchases of Hill's t/d Prescription Diet,

which is specifically formulated to reduce dental plaque and tartar in dogs and cats, according to a news release.

Appointments can be made at OCVH and FVH by calling (732) 363-7202 and Middletown Animal Hospital at (732) 671-1503. Visit www.ocvh.com and www.fischervet.com on the Web to take a virtual tour of both facilities. Visit www.middletownvet.vet-suite.com for more information on Middletown Veterinary Hospital.



(PHOTO BY MARY FRANK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

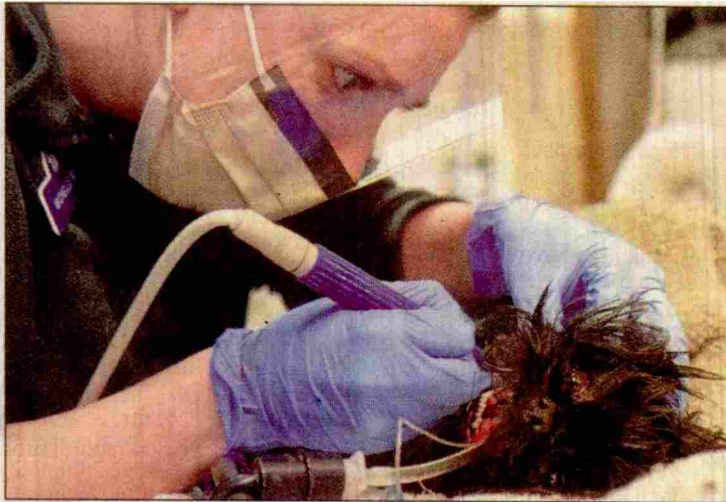
At left: Judeanne Barnes of Middletown Veterinary Hospital applies fluoride to the teeth of Teddy Hall, a wheaten terrier. At right: Dr. Warren Briggs of Ocean County Veterinary Hospital examines a photo of a cat after cleaning its teeth.



(PHOTO BY PETER ACKERMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)



Mike Yurkus of Middletown Veterinary Hospital administers a dose of anesthesia to Teddy Hall, as head technician Judeanne Barnes assists in the procedure.



Vet technician Michelle Medel cleans the teeth of Zooney, a shih tzu, at Ocean County Veterinary Hospital.

Printing imperfections
present during scanning