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Veterinarian urges: Brush pets' teeth

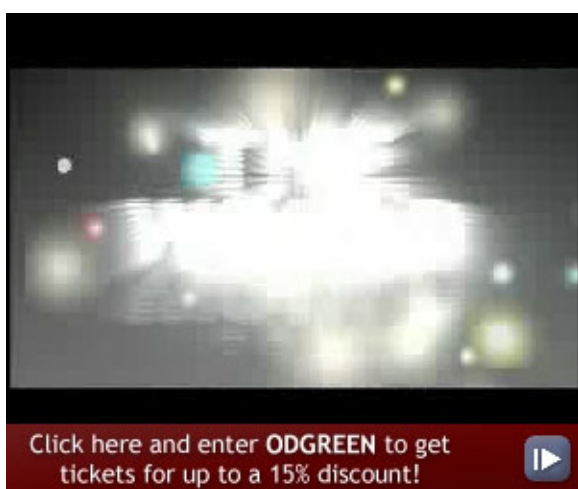
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Veterinarian Maria Arnsman inspects a dog's teeth at New Hartford Animal Hospital in Washington Mills. Marie McNamara, a certified veterinary practice manager there, said regular dental care – both at home and in the vet's office – is an important part of a pet's health care program.

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By **LISA KAPPS**
Pennysaver

Posted Feb 25, 2009 @ 01:25 PM

NEW HARTFORD — While a pet's bad breath may be the most noticeable – and probably most bothersome – symptom of poor oral hygiene, bad breath indicates your pet has a problem such as oral disease or decay, said New Hartford Animal Hospital employee Marie McNamara, a certified veterinary practice manager.

"Bad breath in your pet is not normal," McNamara said.

And while dog biscuits and treats may temporarily alleviate bad breath, McNamara emphasizes that these do not treat the underlying cause.

And periodontal disease, she said, can develop into more serious health issues. The bacteria in the mouth can enter the bloodstream and cause bacterial infections, especially in pets with a pre-existing condition like a heart condition.

Unfortunately, she said, many pets are not receiving the dental care they need.

"By age 3, over 70 percent of dogs and cats have some sort of periodontal disease," McNamara said.

To prevent the development of periodontal disease or reverse its effects, McNamara recommends annual professional cleaning. In addition to the cleaning, there are other steps veterinary professionals can take to prevent periodontal disease.

For example, the New Hartford Animal Hospital vaccinates animals with the P3 dental vaccine.

"It doesn't cut down on the plaque," McNamara said.

However, the P3 vaccine reduces the effects of bacteria

that can cause periodontal disease and tooth loss.

McNamara said veterinary professionals at the New Hartford Animal Hospital will also apply sealants to pets' teeth; these last for about two weeks. After that, owners apply a sealant at home.

McNamara said the most important thing pet owners can do for their pet's dental health is regular at-home brushings. Ideally owners would brush pets' teeth daily, but she recognizes that most pet owners don't have time to that. She suggests brushing on a regular schedule that is as often as feasible for owner and pet.

She also acknowledges that some pets do not enjoy having their teeth brushed.

"Not every pet is going to sit still for you," McNamara said.

Veterinary professionals can instruct owners on "the proper techniques of holding the animal," McNamara said, and in extreme cases owners can set up a schedule for brushings with their veterinary care professional.

To minimize pets' resistance to having their teeth brushed, McNamara recommended beginning at a young age. Also, she said, manufacturers make specialized enzymatic toothpastes for pets – in flavors such as poultry or beef

– that break down plaque even if a pet owner cannot reach all the hard-to-reach spots.

While nothing replaces regular brushing, McNamara said some dental bones and chews are “very effective.” She recommended “Greenies,” a product line that includes a toothbrush-shaped chew, available online at www.greenies.com.

And, McNamara emphasized, “anything that you can do is better than nothing.”



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