

## What causes oral disease?

In a recent study, over 40% of cats had oral disease.<sup>2</sup> Though most oral disease is easily controlled with regular brushing or dental cleanings, many cats don't receive adequate dental care, especially when they're younger.

### Oral disease typically develops in stages:

**Stage 1**—A soft, sticky film called plaque forms in the mouth. Plaque consists of food debris, bacteria and saliva.

**Stage 2**—If plaque is not removed, a hard material called tartar may begin to form. Tartar can irritate the gums and further encourage the growth of plaque.

**Stage 3**—If both plaque and tartar are allowed to build up, this can lead to gingivitis, causing painful inflammation along the gum line.

**Stage 4**—Left untreated, gingivitis may eventually lead to periodontal disease, which can cause pain, tooth loss and severe infection. As periodontal disease progresses, the gums recede, allowing bacteria to travel into the bloodstream and throughout the body, which could lead to other serious health problems.



Feline  
health

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## Oral health is important to overall health

As with people, dental care is a vital part of your cat's overall health plan. Poor oral health can lead to a build-up of harmful bacteria, which can cause tooth decay, painful sores and other issues. As disease progresses, the gums recede, which allows bacteria to travel into the blood stream and throughout the body. This increases the risk of systemic health problems, such as kidney or heart disease.

Good oral health is also important because of the connection between oral disease and feline retrovirus infection, such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV). A recent study found that **more than 14% of cats tested with oral disease were positive for FIV or FeLV.**<sup>1</sup>

## What does a dental treatment involve?

A complete feline dental treatment provides an in-depth view of your cat's oral health. An anesthetic agent will be provided for your cat's safety and comfort, but first your cat will need to be tested to determine if she can safely undergo anesthesia. Once under anesthesia, the teeth, lips, gums, tongue and throat are then thoroughly examined for signs of oral disease.

A dental treatment also includes hand scraping, ultrasonic scaling, polishing and fluoride treatment. Your veterinarian may also recommend x-rays if they suspect infection or damage to the tooth structure.

## Oral health and infectious disease

Because of the link between oral disease and feline infectious disease, you should talk to your veterinarian about FIV and FeLV testing. Especially if your cat shows any signs of oral disease or if your cat:

- Has been exposed to cats with unknown FIV/FeLV status.
- Has an unknown FIV/FeLV testing history.
- Spends any time outdoors (outdoor access increases risk).

## How can I tell if my cat has oral disease?

When was the last time you were able to get a close look at your cat's mouth and teeth? While the visible signs of oral disease might be hard for pet owners to see, there are several indicators you should be aware of:

- Bad breath or foul odor coming from the mouth
- Changes in eating habits or chewing
- Pawing at the mouth or face
- Excessive drooling
- Loss of appetite and/or weight loss
- Red, swollen or bleeding gums
- Loose, broken or abscessed teeth

Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible if your cat shows any of these signs. A simple examination will help them understand what's troubling your cat and how they can help.

**Did you know?**  
More than 14% of cats tested with oral disease were positive for FIV or FeLV.<sup>1</sup>



### References

1. Data on file at IDEXX Laboratories, Inc. Westbrook, Maine USA.
2. Kornya MR, Little SE, Scherk MA, Sears WC, Bienziele D. Association between oral health status and retrovirus test results in cats. *JAVMA*. 2014;245(8):916-922.