



■ Overview

Dental disease is the most common diagnosed condition in adult dogs and cats — affecting more than 80% of dogs and 70% of cats over age 3. It is also one of the most undertreated. Dental disease is not just bad breath: bacteria from infected gum tissue enter the bloodstream and contribute to kidney disease, heart valve infections, and liver damage. Keeping your pet's mouth clean is directly connected to their overall lifespan and quality of life.

■ Dental disease is graded 1–4. Grade 1 (gingivitis) is fully reversible with a professional cleaning. By Grade 3–4, bone loss is irreversible and teeth must be extracted. Early intervention is dramatically more effective and less expensive.

■ Stages of Dental Disease

Grade 1 — Gingivitis: Plaque and mild tartar; gums are red and inflamed but no bone or attachment loss. Fully reversible with professional cleaning and home care.

Grade 2 — Early Periodontitis: Moderate tartar; early bone and attachment loss (<25%). Reversible with cleaning; some pockets need flushing.

Grade 3 — Moderate Periodontitis: Significant attachment loss (25–50%); visible bone loss on dental radiographs. Some teeth can be saved with deep cleaning and possibly root planing.

Grade 4 — Severe Periodontitis: >50% attachment loss; teeth are loose, painful, and acting as a source of chronic bacterial infection. Extraction is required. Bacteria are actively seeding the bloodstream.

■ Professional Dental Cleaning

A proper veterinary dental cleaning requires general anesthesia. There is no safe or effective way to clean below the gum line in an awake animal. "Anesthesia-free dentistry" cleans only visible surfaces and provides a false sense of dental health while disease progresses undetected and untreated below the gumline.

- Supragingival scaling: removal of visible tartar above the gum line
- Subgingival scaling: cleaning of plaque below the gum line where disease lives
- Full-mouth dental radiographs: detects root disease, bone loss, and root resorption not visible on surface exam
- Periodontal probing: measures pocket depth at every tooth
- Polishing: smooths enamel surface to slow plaque re-attachment
- Extractions as needed: performed same appointment when indicated

✓ Anesthesia for dental procedures in healthy pets is safe. The risk of untreated dental disease far exceeds the anesthetic risk. Pre-anesthetic bloodwork helps assess risk for older or higher-risk patients.



■ Home Dental Care

■ Home Dental Care — Effectiveness Comparison

Tooth brushing	★★★★★	Daily	Most effective home care available. Use pet toothpaste (never human — xylitol toxic). Finger brush or soft toothbrush. Start as a puppy/kitten for best compliance.
Dental chews (VOHC-accepted)	★★★██	Daily	Look for the VOHC (Veterinary Oral Health Council) seal of acceptance. Not all dental chews are effective. Examples: Greenies, OraVet.
Dental diets (prescription)	★★★★█	Daily (as food)	Hill's t/d, Royal Canin Dental — fiber matrix mechanically cleans teeth. VOHC accepted. Best for dogs resistant to brushing.
Water additives / oral rinses	★★███	Daily	Some VOHC-accepted products. Useful adjunct, not a substitute for brushing.
Raw bones / antlers	✗ NOT recommended	—	Fractured teeth ("slab fractures") are a common consequence. Avoid hard bones, antlers, and hooves.

■ **Schedule your pet's next wellness exam today.** Preventive care catches disease early — before symptoms appear, before treatment becomes complex, and before costs escalate. The exam your pet skips is the one that misses something important.

■ Final Summary

Daily brushing and annual professional cleanings add years to your pet's life. Start home dental care early, stay consistent, and don't wait for bad breath to signal that disease is advanced.

■ Related XVC Guides:

- [Annual Wellness Exams](#) · [Dental Disease \(Cats\)](#)
- [Anesthesia Guide](#) · [Preventive Care Timeline by Age](#)



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