



Gingivitis is common in cats and dogs. Gum tissue becomes inflamed as it responds to plaque in the mouth, but this inflammation is reversible. Plaque initially accumulates because bacteria attach to a natural film on the teeth. When plaque is allowed to accumulate, it mineralizes (hardens) and becomes dental calculus. Mineralization begins within two to three weeks after initial plaque formation. The gum tissue adjacent to the teeth may be reddened or slightly swollen. There should be no bleeding. Routine oral home care including antibacterial rinses and brushing may help control gingivitis.

Periodontal disease is a progression of gingivitis to an irreversible inflammation where the supporting structures of the teeth are damaged. Periodontal disease may appear as swollen red gums that have receded down the root structure. The teeth may move in the socket, indicating extensive bone loss. Heavy calculus deposits and a foul odor are common. The inflammatory changes in periodontitis not only result in tooth attachment loss; but also an abnormal host immune response, an increase in harmful (virulent) bacteria, then degradation of bone support.

Periodontitis must be managed with the help of your veterinarian. A first step may be to have your pet receive a teeth cleaning or periodontal treatment. The only way that this can be done effectively and thoroughly is to have your pet under general anesthesia. Awake dental scaling cannot prevent or treat periodontal disease.

Stages of Periodontal Disease

The stages of periodontal disease are simply described as follows:

0 Normal

1 Gingivitis: Mild amount of plaque and mild inflammation of the gingival margin

2 Moderate amount of subgingival plaque and supragingival calculus; moderate inflammation of gingiva

3 Periodontitis: Increasing amounts of plaque and calculus, including subgingival calculus; established gingivitis and beginning pocket formation; first signs of bone loss on x-rays

4 Severe inflammation, deep pocket formation, bone loss, mobility of teeth