



Bartram Trail
Veterinary Hospital



A Guide to Comprehensive Oral Health Assessment & Treatments (COHAT)

For Keeping Your Pet's Smile Healthy

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Comprehensive Oral Health Assessment and Treatment (COHAT)

What is a COHAT?

A Comprehensive Oral Health Assessment & Treatment (COHAT) is a comprehensive dental procedure for your pet similar to what we experience when we visit the dentist but tailored to the specific needs of our canine and feline companions. A COHAT is a thorough assessment of your pet's mouth conducted through an oral exam and dental x-rays while under anesthesia. A COHAT always includes professional dental prophylaxis (ultrasonic cleaning and polishing of teeth). The veterinarian will use the findings of the exam and x-rays to develop a treatment plan for any problems that are found.

Does my pet need COHAT? Why?

Yes! Just like humans, pets can suffer from dental problems that can affect their overall health. Regular COHAT procedures are a critical part of maintaining a healthy, pain-free mouth, also helping to prevent and treat dental diseases. Frequency of COHAT varies by species, size, and the individual animal's inflammatory response to plaque and tartar. Typically, the smaller the dog, the more frequent COHATs are needed. Most small and medium breed dogs need a COHAT once per year due to their high predisposition to dental disease. A COHAT is much more than a dental cleaning and consists of 360-degree probing around each tooth, oral soft tissue examination (tongue, tonsils, palate), and full mouth dental x-rays. This process can identify gum and bone loss, tooth root abscesses, tooth resorptions, tooth fractures, oral masses and other pathologies.

After this evaluation is performed, the teeth are cleaned thoroughly with an ultrasonic scaler to remove plaque and tartar and then polished to leave a smooth surface that will slow plaque and tartar accumulation. Special attention is paid to remove plaque/tartar beneath the gumline since this is most likely to cause gum and bone loss around the tooth.

Tooth brushing alone does not remove this plaque/tartar beneath the gumline. More than 50% of the tooth resides beneath the gumline, so this approach is critical to find and prevent painful oral disease.

Oral health affects the entire body and a COHAT can help your veterinarian find and treat dental problems that may be causing your pet pain or predisposing your pet to other health problems such as heart, kidney, and liver disease.



What is Periodontal Disease and why should I be concerned?

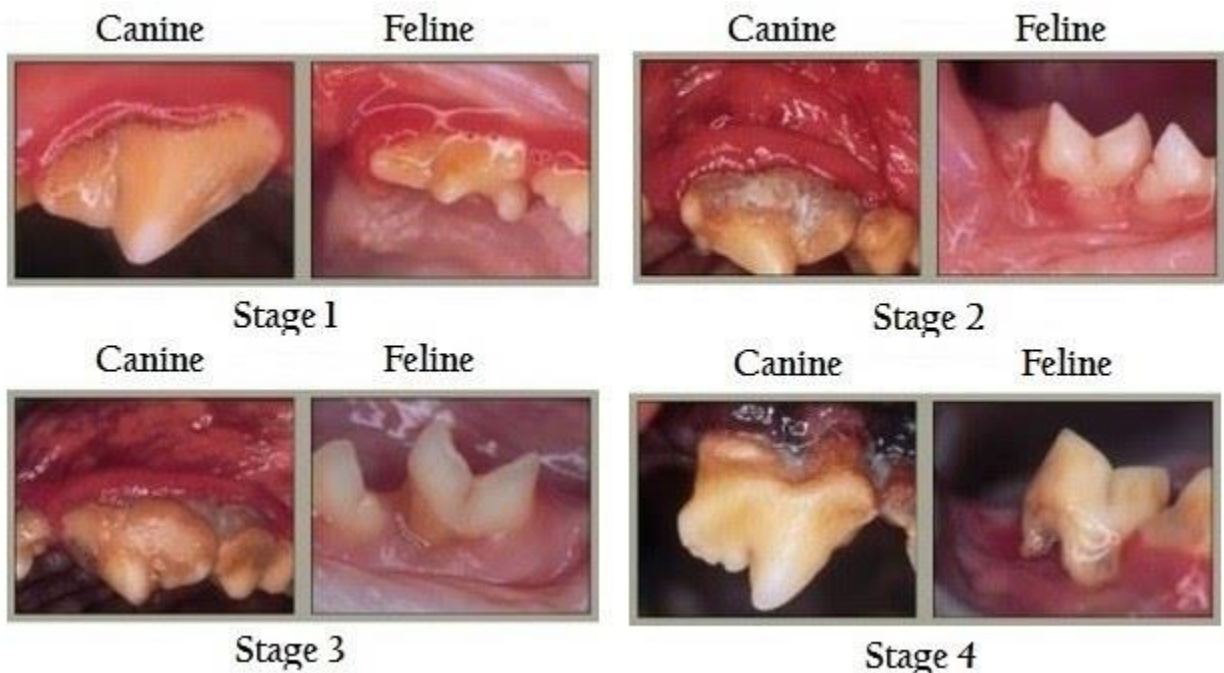
Periodontal disease is a common but serious gum infection that damages the soft tissue and bone supporting the teeth. Left untreated, it can lead to painful tooth loss and other health problems. Periodontal disease is **the most common disease in dogs and cats** and is preventable with routine COHATs and oral homecare.



It starts as gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) in response to bacterial laden plaque and tartar accumulating beneath the gumline. Bacteria in this 'sub-gingival' plaque begin a cycle of damage to the supporting tissues around the tooth. Damage to these supporting tissues (gum and bone) is called periodontal disease.

Pockets around the teeth caused by periodontal disease become filled with large amounts of bacteria laden plaque and if left untreated, can progress down the root and cause a painful tooth root abscess. These pockets can also cause showering of bacteria into the blood stream which can damage other organ systems.

If treated promptly, gingivitis is reversible and subsequent periodontal disease can be prevented! Some examples of periodontal disease mild (stage 1) to severe (stage 4) are indicated by the following pictures.



How do I know if my dog or cat has periodontal disease?

Here are some signs:

- Persistent bad breath
- Blood on a chew toy or bloody saliva
- Visible tartar near the gumline
- Loose teeth
- Red/bleeding gums
- Change in chewing such as chewing on one side or eating slower
- Dropping food
- Head shyness (your pet does not want you to touch his/her head)
- Drooling
- Difficulty or refusing to eat

Please note that some animals with periodontal disease may have few or none of these signs present since this disease primarily progresses beneath the gumline.

How do I know if my pet has a painful mouth?

Dogs and cats are incredibly good at hiding their oral pain. The vast majority of pets we diagnose with tooth root abscesses or other painful oral conditions have no clinical signs of oral pain noted by the owner at home. All the same nerve endings and pain pathways that humans possess are present in our pets, so we know diseases such as tooth root abscesses cause the same pain as they do in people. It is our job as veterinarians to notice subtle changes of the oral tissues that may indicate a larger, potentially painful condition. Chronic oral pain can cause lethargy, irritability, and other behavioral changes in our pets.

What Happens During A COHAT?

At the consult appointment:

1. One of our veterinarians' assistants will ask you questions about your pet's medical and dental history.
2. The doctor will then give your pet a thorough physical examination including an oral examination.
3. Preanesthetic diagnostic tests, including but not limited to a complete blood count and a serum chemistry profile will be performed. The veterinarian may recommend additional tests based on your pet's health and age. The purpose of these tests is to ensure your pet is a good candidate for general anesthesia.
4. You will be given an estimate for the procedure. Our team will give you a range on the estimate that will include potential tooth extractions and anesthesia time if any are expected. Since the detailed assessment of teeth occurs when your pet is anesthetized this estimate will be our best guess based on our experience. After reviewing the estimate and answering any questions you have, we can schedule the procedure.

The night before the procedure:

- Do not feed after 10pm.
- To avoid dehydration - please give your pet access to water before arriving at the hospital

The day of the procedure:

You will briefly meet with the veterinarians' assistant to go over any additional questions regarding the estimate and the COHAT procedure. The veterinarians' assistant will set up a tentative discharge time and then admit your pet to the hospital and prepare for anesthesia. The doctor performing the COHAT will then perform another pre-anesthetic exam to ensure no significant changes have occurred since the consultation.

Our anesthesia protocols:

Who performs and monitors the anesthesia process?

Your pet is anesthetized using a personalized anesthetic protocol prescribed by our doctors based on your pet's medical history, and temperament. Your pet is intubated to protect and control their airway and then monitored constantly under anesthesia by one of our trained veterinary technicians. Blood pressure, blood oxygen saturation, end tidal carbon dioxide, electrocardiogram (ECG), respiratory rate and body temperature are monitored to ensure your pet's safety. Our veterinarians oversee the anesthesia monitoring and direct any adjustments as needed.

Intravenous fluids will be administered throughout the procedure to help maintain your pet's blood pressure. Your pet will be kept warm with warming blankets during the procedure.

The COHAT Procedure:



Photo Credit Jan Bellows JAAHA 2019 AAHA Dental Guidelines

Visual and periodontal assessment: The doctor will visually evaluate and palpate the soft tissues of the oral cavity including the tongue, palate, tonsils, and lips. The teeth are then assessed 360 degrees with a periodontal probe to look for abnormal pockets that would indicate gum/bone loss. The teeth are also assessed for fractures, discoloration, and mobility. Any abnormalities are recorded.

Dental X-Rays: Images are taken of all teeth. The doctor will review the images looking for evidence of bone loss, tooth root abscesses, pulp canal health, crown or root fractures, and resorptive lesions.

Treatment: A treatment plan based on the findings of the visual exam, periodontal assessment, and dental x-rays is created by the doctor and then the owner is called to review the findings, treatment recommendations and estimate. Treatment may consist of root planing or extraction. Root planing involves cleaning small pockets of bone loss and reopposing gum tissue to prevent progression of bone loss. Extraction (tooth removal) is indicated for teeth with severe bone loss, tooth root abscess, fracture with exposed pulp or resorption of the crown above the gumline. Prior to any treatment that may cause pain, local anesthetics will be used to numb the area. Prior to any treatments/extractions that are performed, the teeth will be thoroughly cleaned.



Photo Credits Jan Bellows JAAHA 2019 AAHA Dental Guidelines

Supragingival cleaning: Refers to cleaning the crown of the tooth that is visible above the gumline. Tartar and plaque are removed using a state-of-the-art ultra-high frequency ultrasonic scaler that removes tartar quickly but is gentle on the tooth surface.

Subgingival cleaning: Refers to cleaning the surface of the tooth under the gumline. This is an extremely important step as subgingival plaque and calculus is the cause of periodontal disease (gum and bone loss).



Polishing: Smooths the tooth surface to decrease adherence of plaque forming bacteria.



Patient Discharge: Your pet's technician/doctor will review the oral assessment and any treatment that was performed. Further home care instructions regarding diet, medications and allowed activities will be explained to you. A recheck exam, if needed, will be scheduled.

What can I do to prevent periodontal disease?

Regular COHATs based on your pet's risk factors is the first step. Preventative treatments at home such as water additives, dental chews, dental diets, and tooth brushing are effective at preventing plaque accumulation after a professional cleaning but ineffective at removing accumulated hardened tartar. Tooth brushing is the gold standard for preventing plaque/tartar accumulation just as it is in people. To be effective, brushing should be done at least 2-3 times per week, ideally daily. Some dogs and cats are amenable to regular brushing, but in our experience, many are not, and regular brushing may not be a realistic strategy.

Brushing Your Pet's Teeth – 5 Easy Steps!



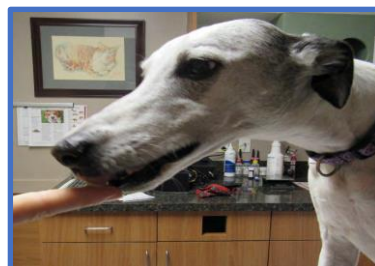
Step 1: Train your pet to become comfortable with you putting things in his/her mouth. Example: try dipping your finger in beef bouillon. Call your pet with a voice that means "treat" and let him/her lick the liquid off your finger. Then rub your soaked finger gently over his/her gums and teeth. After a few sessions, your pet should look forward to this and you can move on.



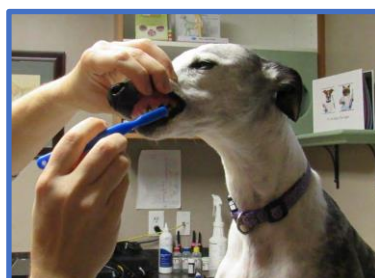
Step 2: Place gauze around your finger (you can again dip it in some bouillon). Gently rub the teeth in a circular motion with your gauzed finger. Repeat this for the number of sessions it takes to feel comfortable with this procedure. Remember to praise him/her and keep an upbeat attitude.



Step 3: After your pet is used to having the flavored gauze in his/her mouth, you are ready to start with a toothbrush, dental sponge, or pad. You need to get him/her used to the consistency of these items, especially the bristles on a brush. So, let him/her lick something tasty off the brush or pad so he/she gets used to the texture.



Step 4: Once your pet is comfortable with the cleaning item you are using, you can now add the toothpaste. Pet toothpastes either have poultry, malt, or some other flavor so hopefully your pet will find a taste that they like. To get your pet used to the flavor and consistency of the toothpaste, let him/her lick some off your finger and then apply a small amount to your pet's gum line with your finger. Always praise your pet afterward.



Step 5: Once your pet is used to the toothbrush and toothpaste you are ready to start brushing daily. Always talk to him/her in a happy voice during the process and remember to praise him/her at the end. At first, you may just want to brush one or both upper canine teeth (the large ones in the front of the mouth). These are the easiest teeth for you to get at and will give you some practice. When your pet accepts having several teeth brushed, slowly increase the number of teeth you are brushing.





Oral Homecare Product Recommendations

We recommend VOHC (Veterinary Oral Health Council) accepted products. The VOHC is a group of veterinary dental experts that exists to recognize products that meet pre-set standards of plaque and calculus (tartar) retardation in dogs and cats. Products are awarded the VOHC Seal of Acceptance following review of data from trials conducted according to VOHC protocols.



(16 oz)

We commonly recommend **Healthy Mouth** water additive since it is a simple, no hassle addition to your pet's daily regimen and it has been proven to reduce plaque accumulation by 71% and 76% in two independent clinical studies. To date this is the only water additive backed by clinical research. The active ingredient is an enzyme found in papayas (papain) that prevents soft plaque from hardening into tartar/calculus, so it is more likely to be removed during normal chewing action. Zinc oxide in the formula has natural antibacterial properties. Many people like that this is a natural product and the natural flavorings (blueberries, cloves) impart a pleasant smell to pet's breath.



Dental chews we like include **Vetoquinol Veggident Chews; Greenies; and Virbac C.E.T. Hextra**. Dogs will gnaw and chew on these for a prolonged period which provides good abrasion to the tooth surface that will remove plaque. Another dental chew we recommend is **Oravet**. This deposits a waxy substance on the tooth surface that makes it difficult for plaque to attach to the tooth.



Prescription dental diets such as **Purina DH Dental Health** and **Hill's t/d** are other examples of hassle-free strategies to provide oral homecare. Both diets have unique kibble shape and texture designed to provide an abrasive effect on teeth during chewing to remove plaque buildup.

Combining a number of these methods usually provides the best results between COHAT procedures.

Together we can work to keep your pet's mouth pain free and clean. This will improve their overall health and quality of life!

