



Your Pet's Dental Treatment

This handout is designed to talk you through your animal's upcoming dental treatment, to help you understand what the process involves, why the costs involved in dental treatment can sometimes seem high, and what you can do after the dental to help improve your pet's dental health!

The Basics

It is likely that almost every dog and cat will need dental treatment at some point in their lives, some may require multiple procedures. Just like us, dogs and cats get plaque and tartar building up on their teeth, and just like us, they really need to brush their teeth daily to stop this build up! However, not many animals happily brush their teeth morning and evening, so we often end up in a position where dental disease takes hold and we have to intervene.

The Procedure

Veterinary dentistry has come a long way in the last 20 years. Due to advancements in equipment and our knowledge, we are able to offer outstanding dental care to the same standards of human procedures. We even do root canal treatment in animals as well! Our standard practice protocol is to scale all the teeth so they are clean first, then to assess each tooth individually (30 in cats, 42 in dogs), documenting any damage or disease to the tooth or surrounding gum. We are now also able to xray the tooth roots, to see what's going on beneath the surface. We can only xray a few teeth at a time – no fancy 360[®] machine like the human dentists have – so even just the process of cleaning, assessing and xraying the teeth can take up to an hour! We then have to set about extracting any teeth which need to be removed.

Human Teeth vs Animal Teeth



Human teeth on xray

Many people who have had teeth extracted at the dentist themselves will perhaps think of tooth extraction as a fairly quick procedure. Unfortunately dog and cat teeth are not quite this simple! Canine and feline teeth have much longer, smaller and more delicate roots than human teeth, making them easy to snap and break. Cats especially often suffer from a condition where the roots of the teeth partially or fully fuse to the jaw bone they sit in, making them very tricky to remove cleanly and in one piece. Surgical extractions of large teeth require a great deal of time and patience to be done properly – in the largest teeth it can take up to an hour to take just one tooth out, and some dental procedures involve us taking 20+ teeth out! Human dentists will usually only treat one tooth at a time, whereas we are treating the whole mouth in one go.

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Dog's teeth on xray

The Cost

For many people, the cost of dental treatment comes as a shock. Hopefully the information above goes some way to explaining why your pet's dental treatment might cost more than you had expected. Obviously we have to anaesthetise our patients in order to carry out a dental procedure,



so the cost of the general anaesthetic makes veterinary dental procedures more expensive than human ones before we've even started on the teeth. Also, we are often performing a lengthy and complex procedure, with some dental procedures taking several hours. In some severe cases, we may advise that the procedure is split into two or more sessions; this is purely for the safety of your animal. Under general anaesthetic, an animal's blood pressure and body temperature tend to drop as time goes on, so if we can see that they are likely to need a very lengthy dental procedure, it is safer for them to undergo two shorter anaesthetics a month or so apart than to have one long anaesthetic to do everything in one go. Finally, we may have given you quite a wide estimate for your dental procedure; this is because it is almost impossible for us to fully assess your pet's teeth and decide which teeth need extracting until we have them under the anaesthetic and can remove all the tartar from the teeth, probe them and xray them. This means we

don't know until the day whether your animal will need 1 tooth extracting or 10, which could be the difference between a £300 bill and a £600 bill.

Dental Care Post Operatively

Once your pet has had their dental, we need to do as much as possible to maintain good oral hygiene. The best way to maintain your pet's dental health is brushing, just like us! Ideally this should be done daily, with a suitable brush and special toothpaste (never a human one as fluoride is toxic to dogs and cats). The nurses can show you the best way to brush your animal's teeth at your complimentary post dental checks and this needs to be introduced slowly so as not to scare your pet. We also have oral hygiene gels, which can be applied to the teeth and gums and contain antibacterial agents to reduce the build up of plaque following a dental. Finally, take care with dental chews and dental foods – these are great for preventing dental disease, but once dental disease occurs, they can make matters worse by forcing bacteria into gaps between the teeth and gums, so please only use these if we advise it is safe to do so.

