

# Dental Question's

## **What actually causes the bad breath when tooth/gum disease is present?**

Bad breath, medically known as "halitosis", results from the bacterial infection of the gums (gingiva) and supporting tissues seen with periodontal disease (periodontal = occurring around a tooth).

## **Are bad teeth and gums the cause?**

Most likely, YES. However, it is very important to schedule a visit to the veterinarian. In rare cases, some diseases or situations can cause bad breath in the absence of, or in addition to, tooth/gum disease. Conditions such as kidney failure, diabetes, nasal or facial skin infections, cancers, or situations where the animal is ingesting feces or other materials, can cause bad breath with or without periodontal disease.

## **What is the difference between plaque and tartar?**

*Plaque* is a colony of bacteria, mixed with saliva, blood cell, and other bacterial components. Plaque often leads to tooth and gum disease. Dental *tartar*, or *calculus*, occurs when plaque becomes mineralized (hard) and firmly adheres to the tooth enamel then erodes the gingival tissue.

## **What can happen if my pet's teeth aren't cleaned?**

Both plaque and tartar damage the teeth and gums. Disease starts with the gums (gingiva). They become inflamed - red, swollen, and sore. The gums finally separate from the teeth, creating pockets where more bacteria, plaque, and tartar build up. This in turn causes more damage, and finally tooth and bone loss.

*This affects the whole body, too.* Bacteria from these inflamed oral areas can enter the bloodstream and affect major body organs. The liver, kidneys, heart, and lungs are most commonly affected. Antibiotics are used prior to and after a dental cleaning to prevent bacterial spread through the blood stream.

## **But my pet is only 3 years old! Isn't this an "old dog/cat disease"?**

No - dental disease is NOT just for the senior pets.

From the [Pets Need Dental Care, Too](#) web site:

*"Without proper dental care, 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show signs of oral disease by age three."*