**Oral Health Care—Healthy Pet Week, April 8-14, 2018—Website Posting**

**Oral Health and Care**

Periodontal disease is the most common clinical disease affecting companion animals and indicates that there is swelling of the gum tissue above the teeth. This swelling is known as gingivitis and it forms due to the accumulation of plaque, or bacteria, on the teeth over time. Plaque can harden into visible calculus, or tartar, and can eventually lead to periodontal disease. Periodontal disease can be expensive to treat and can cause bad breath, pain, local infection, bleeding gums, loss of teeth, loss of bone, jaw fractures, and systemic disease affecting the kidneys, liver, and heart!

Most dogs and cats have evidence of periodontal disease by the age of 3. But the good news is that periodontal disease is preventable! In addition to annual professional dental cleanings under anesthesia, there are many ways to help control tartar build up at home. Brushing the teeth, ideally daily, is the best way to slow down bacteria on the teeth. Gradual introduction, along with positive re-enforcement training, can greatly help with compliance at home! The supplies you will need to start brushing are a pet toothbrush or finger brush, pet specific toothpaste, and some tasty treats for positive encouragement. Dental chews, dental wipes, water additives, and specialized prescription dental diets are available and make dental care as easy as you need at home! For a list of clinically proven home dental products, visit the Veterinary Oral Health Council website below.

Small mammals, such as rabbits and guinea pigs, also need routine dental care. The teeth in these animals constantly grow for their entire lives, and improper diet, poor genetics or anatomical misalignment can cause their teeth to overgrow into sharp points and hooks. In these situations, a sedated dental procedure is often necessary to smooth down pointy teeth and resolve any oral pain your pet may be experiencing. The best way to avoid dental disease in these small mammals is through proper diet. Make sure to feed unlimited amounts of timothy hay or orchard grass to your pet rabbits and rodents to help them grind down their teeth on a daily basis.

Ask your veterinarian if it is time to schedule a professional dental cleaning and use the resources below to help your pet live a longer, healthier life!

<https://www.avdc.org>

<http://www.vohc.org>