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Anesthesia Free Teeth Cleaning:

Pet Owners beware of this NON-PROFESSIONAL Procedure

We are seeing more dogs that have had anesthesia-free pet dentistry. Unfortunately, some of these pets have serious dental problems that go undiagnosed and improperly treated. These are well-meaning pet owners who may be fearful of anesthesia or can't afford professional veterinary dental care; so they opt for anesthesia-free teeth scaling. Non-Anesthetic dentistry is really just a cosmetic procedure that addresses only the visible surfaces of the pet's teeth. However, periodontal disease affects all surfaces of the teeth and is especially active below the gum line. This infection is not addressed with Non-Anesthetic Dentistry and gives a false sense of accomplishment. These pets continue to suffer for years with low-grade dental pain until eventually they are unable to eat due to oral pain. The owners are then forced to pay for extensive oral-dental surgery to treat the advanced infection. This costs the pet owner more money and the dog or cat will often need many teeth extracted.

Your pet's teeth may look cleaner on the outside, but periodontal plaque and disease causing bacteria are left behind under the gum line!

A thorough oral exam and cleaning can't be accomplished on a pet that is awake. Anesthesia immobilizes your dog or cat to insure their safety and cooperation during a procedure. It allows for a thorough exam and cleaning of all the surfaces inside the mouth. Anesthesia is also necessary for taking x-rays, which allows evaluation of the supporting bone quality. All of this can be accomplished with minimal stress and discomfort to the animal.

**The American Veterinary Dental College (AVDC)
Position Statement on
Non-Professional Dental Scaling**

In the United States and Canada, only licensed veterinarians can practice veterinary medicine. Veterinary medicine includes veterinary surgery, medicine and dentistry. Anyone providing dental services other than a licensed veterinarian, or a supervised and trained veterinary technician, is practicing veterinary medicine without a license and is subject to criminal charges.

This page addresses dental scaling procedures performed on pets without anesthesia, often by individuals untrained in veterinary dental techniques. Although the term Anesthesia-Free Dentistry has been used in this context, AVDC prefers to use the more accurate term Non-Professional Dental Scaling (NPDS) to describe this combination.

Owners of pets naturally are concerned when anesthesia is required for their pet. However, performing NPDS on an un-anesthetized pet is inappropriate for the following reasons:

1. Dental tartar is firmly adhered to the surface of the teeth. Scaling to remove tartar is accomplished using ultrasonic and sonic power scalers, plus hand instruments that must have a sharp working edge to be used effectively. Even slight head movement by the patient could result in injury to the oral tissues of the patient, and the operator may be bitten when the patient reacts.
2. Professional dental scaling includes scaling the surfaces of the teeth both above and below the gingival margin (gum line), followed by dental polishing. The most critical part of a dental scaling procedure is scaling the tooth surfaces that are within the gingival pocket (the subgingival space between the gum and the root), where periodontal disease is active. Because the patient cooperates, dental scaling of human teeth performed by a professional trained in the procedures can be completed successfully without anesthesia. However, access to the subgingival area of every tooth is impossible in an unanesthetized canine or feline patient. Removal of dental tartar on the visible surfaces of the teeth has little effect on a pet's health, and provides a false sense of accomplishment. The effect is purely cosmetic.
3. Inhalation anesthesia using a cuffed endotracheal tube provides three important advantages... the cooperation of the patient with a procedure, it does not understand, elimination of pain resulting from examination and treatment of affected dental tissues during the procedure, and protection of the airway and lungs from accidental aspiration.
4. A complete oral examination, which is an important part of a professional dental scaling procedure, is not possible in an un-anesthetized patient. The surfaces of the teeth facing the tongue cannot be examined, and areas of disease and discomfort are likely to be missed.

Safe use of an anesthetic or sedative in a dog or cat requires evaluation of the general health and size of the patient to determine the appropriate drug and dose, and continual monitoring of the patient.

Veterinarians are trained in all of these procedures. Prescribing or administering anesthetic or sedative drugs by a non-veterinarian can be very dangerous, and is illegal. Although anesthesia will never be 100% risk-free, modern anesthetic and patient evaluation techniques used in veterinary hospitals minimize the risks, and millions of dental scaling procedures are safely performed each year in veterinary hospitals.

To minimize the need for professional dental scaling procedures and to maintain optimal oral health, AVDC recommends daily dental home care from an early age in dogs and cats. This should include brushing or use of other effective techniques to retard accumulation of dental plaque, such as dental diets and chew materials. This, combined with periodic examination of the patient by a veterinarian and with dental scaling under anesthesia when indicated, will optimize lifelong oral health for dogs and cats.