

Sometimes there are questions that do not have absolute answers and today's inquiry would qualify as one of those questions. Tarpy is a seven year old beagle mix dog and recently went through some extensive dental work. He lost a couple of his teeth due to bacterial infection of the roots, and his caretakers want to prevent such events in the future.

Tarpy had never had any dental work in the past and Greg and Monica are determined to avoid as much dental work in Tarpy's future as possible. They realize part of this avoidance will actually involve regular dental prophylaxis and they want to know how often that procedure should be done. Therein lies the question without a definitive answer.

Dental disease is a very individual process in both dogs and cats, and in fact if you talk with your own dentist I suspect they would report the same to be true in humans. Some companions are more prone to the development of dental tartar that can lead to worsening dental disease. I have seen some patients that with minimal to no dental care, maintain good teeth. Conversely, we have in our practice dogs and cats that have to have their teeth cleaned every four to six months in order to avoid severe dental disease.

The predominant reason for propensity to develop dental disease versus not appears to be genetic and has much to do with how the enamel molecules pack around the teeth. There are of course other factors including diet and bacteria within the mouth that also play a role.

In discussing diet as it pertains to dental disease, it was commonly thought that dry foods were a better choice for our companions when it comes to trying to prevent dental disease. This is not entirely true. What is true is that foods that are higher in sugar definitely contribute to dental disease. I am sure this comes as no surprise to many of you as the same is true for people. What may be surprising is that many of the snack foods developed for dogs and cat are very high in sugar. This is especially true for the softer variety of snacks which use the sugar to maintain the texture of the snack.

What I would recommend for Tarpy and for all of our dog and cat patients is to have regular evaluations of their oral cavity along with a physical examination. On an individual basis, this will allow us to determine more accurately an appropriate interval for your companion's individual dental care needs. In most cases, this is an annual evaluation with or without dental cleaning, but as I mentioned, there are cases requiring more frequent intervals.

Your veterinarian will be able to work out an individual plan for your companion and also help teach you to care for your pet's teeth at home. Yes, brushing your dog's teeth can be very effective at reducing dental disease. That I am sure is no revelation to most of you, however I am pretty sure it does not sound like much fun to most of you either, though it can be made part of a routine and as such becomes ingrained into your daily life and no longer seems like much of a chore. There is one disclaimer however and that is there are some cats that simply will not allow you to brush their teeth. If this is the case with your cat, do not press the issue, simply plan on regular prophylactic cleanings.