

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN A DENTAL

80% of dogs & cats over the age of 5 have some degree of dental disease! We often get asked what is involved in dental work for animals and the costs associated with dental treatment. Below is some information to help you understand what the procedure involves.

The vets will perform a dental check during all consultations and this is generally when dental disease is diagnosed. Should dental work be required, then an estimate of costs will be provided. This estimate will vary depending on the extent of work involved. Please discuss any concerns you have about costs with your vet prior to the procedure as full payment is required on discharge.

Your pet will be admitted into hospital the morning of the procedure and as this is considered day surgery, they will be able to go home with you in the afternoon. Occasionally older animals or those that have a lengthy anaesthetic may be kept in overnight for further monitoring and pain relief.

When the animal arrives we will get a current body weight and settle them into a cage in our treatment room to get them used to their surroundings. If they are scared or apprehensive we will try our best to keep them as happy as possible e.g. boxes to hide in for cats, quiet corners for dogs who don't like cages or towels over cages to keep it darker. We also use pheromone sprays to further alleviate their anxiety.

If blood work is required, we take a small sample from the animal's jugular vein whilst they are still conscious. This involves clipping a small patch of hair on their neck. While pre-anaesthetic blood work is optional, we strongly recommend that all animals undergoing a general anaesthetic have pre-anaesthetic blood work performed. This provides us with valuable information on how their red blood cells, white blood cells, electrolytes and different organs are functioning. If we have any concerns we call you prior to the procedure.

The animal is then pre-medicated. We use a combination of drugs based on the type of procedure and health of the animal but usually include a sedative and pain relief. We place an intravenous port into your pet's vein, usually in a front leg and start intravenous fluids. We will shave a small patch on the leg to facilitate this. Fluid support is essential for maintaining blood pressure and kidney function whilst they are under general anaesthetic. This is particularly important for older animals. The intravenous port also gives us fast access in case we need to give any other drugs during the procedure.

The animal is then provided with pre-oxygenation so we can maximize the oxygen in their lungs before their anaesthetic. Whilst this is being provided the vet gives an induction drug which causes the animal to fall asleep. They then have a tube placed in their trachea (windpipe) to facilitate clear airflow to their lungs and block any material from the dental work heading down the trachea. This tube is hooked up to an anaesthetic machine that provides further anaesthetic in gas form and oxygen.

Whilst the vet is starting the dental examination, the nurses are attaching multiple forms of monitoring equipment to measure temperature, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, heart rate and heart rhythm. These machines help to monitor the anaesthetic and ensure if there is an abnormality it is picked up fast and dealt with. Meanwhile the vet is completing a full dental examination of the mouth.

This involves counting the teeth, probing each tooth pocket, noting down any abnormalities and in most cases a full set of dental x-rays. X-rays are extremely useful in providing us with information about the tooth below the gum and often we find hidden problems that need addressing. If any teeth are considered damaged, rotten, infected or loose they will be removed. We always place a local anaesthetic to alleviate local pain from the extraction site. This usually makes the general anaesthetic smoother and provides additional pain relief to our patient. The extraction is done in a similar fashion to humans utilising similar equipment and methods to remove teeth. Once a tooth is removed, where possible, we will close the hole remaining. The stitches are absorbable and will dissolve over time. Extractions can take anywhere from 3 minutes to 3 hours depending on the size of the animal, the type of tooth and the extent of the disease. This is where your estimate provides room for more complicated, timely extractions.

Any remaining teeth are then scaled using an electric scaler and polished. The mouth is flushed out with an antiseptic wash and the animal is woken up. Post-operatively your pet's temperature, heart rate and respiration are continually monitored to ensure they are recovering smoothly. They may be given further pain relief if required. The intravenous fluids are left running until we feel they have recovered fully from the general anaesthetic. They may also receive antibiotics at this point.

By the time you turn up to pick up your pet they are standing and alert. Sometimes they will still seem a little groggy or quiet and this can continue until the following day. They will be sent home with discharge instructions and any relevant medications (such as pain relief or antibiotics). A free of charge recheck is provided after 2-3 days to ensure they are recovering well.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are other vets cheaper?

We firmly believe you get what you pay for and we want the best for your pet! We pride ourselves on our excellent standard of care and our staff endeavour to make your pet's dental experience as smooth and pain-free as possible. We understand you might shop around which is why it is so important to outline what is involved in the dental procedure so you can question other vets on their protocols such as intravenous fluids, local anaesthetic and monitoring equipment. Talk to them carefully about what the procedure includes. If you have cost concerns please discuss it with us.

Can they manage with fewer teeth?

Domestic dogs and cats are easily able to cope with less teeth. Cats have 30 and dogs have 42 so they have plenty spare! If a tooth is infected or broken it can cause a significant amount of pain, thus the animal is usually better off without it. In fact owners quite often report their pet having a whole new lease on life once the infected teeth are removed. In some instances a full mouth extraction is performed and the animal lives a long happy life with no teeth at all.

Written by P Honson 2017