

Does your dog's smile hurt?

It's the cold hard tooth: Your dog has some stage of periodontal disease. Here's what to look for and how to treat it so your dog can smile easy.

Did you know? Your dog has some stage of periodontal disease—it's the most common disease affecting dogs and cats! Periodontal disease is inflammation and infection of the supporting structures (like gum tissue and bone) of the teeth. It starts with gingivitis and can progress to spontaneous tooth loss.

Does your dog's breath stink? It shouldn't. Dog and cats' breath should have almost no odor. Does your dog drop their food, turn their head when eating, chew on only one side of the mouth or prefer soft food only? These are all potential signs of periodontal disease. Since it's an active infection, that means chronic pain and inflammation—which can also affect your dog's systemic organs like the kidneys, heart and liver if not treated.

Stage 1: This is gingivitis only. The gum line is red and bleeds when touched. There's no root exposure (gum recession), and on the X-ray the bone levels are normal.

Stage 2: In this stage, we'll see mild bone loss. The gingiva is swollen and there is pus below the gum line. On the X-rays, there's early loss of bone around the roots.

Stage 3: At this point there's moderate bone loss. There's visible gum recession and accumulation of pus, food and tartar along the gum line. On the X-ray, there's more advanced bone loss along the front root of the tooth.

Stage 4: In this stage, we'll see severe bone loss. There's a large amount of tartar,

pus and food material around the visible roots of the tooth. There's marked loss of bone around the roots on the X-ray. The tooth is dead and the roots are surrounded by infection. Teeth are loose and may fall out spontaneously during chewing or picking up food and toys.

Time for treatment

Treating periodontal disease involves oral homecare: think daily tooth brushing with a tooth brush, and periodic professional dental cleanings. Talk to your veterinarian about how often your dog should have a professional dental cleaning and how to brush your dog's teeth.

For information on products that are proven to help reduce plaque and tartar, visit the veterinary oral health council website: www.vohc.org.

