

ANESTHESIA-FREE DENTAL CLEANING

Cooper is a 9-year-old Miniature Schnauzer whom we met for the first time in February 2013 for evaluation of a fractured tooth. He had been having anesthesia-free teeth cleaning performed every 3 months for several years, and his parents had begun brushing his teeth several times weekly over the previous several months.

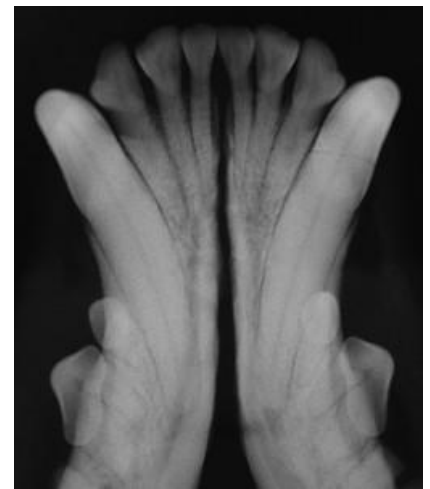
He returned for general anesthesia and treatment of the fractured tooth in March. As part of a complete examination, full-mouth radiographs (x-rays) were obtained, and periodontal probing & diagnostic dental charting were performed. We were dismayed to find that many of Cooper's teeth were loose and had periodontal pockets of 4-6mm (normal probing depth for dogs is up to 3mm). There was even a 9mm pocket at one of his lower canine teeth!



The radiographs revealed nearly 100% bone loss at all of his lower incisor teeth:

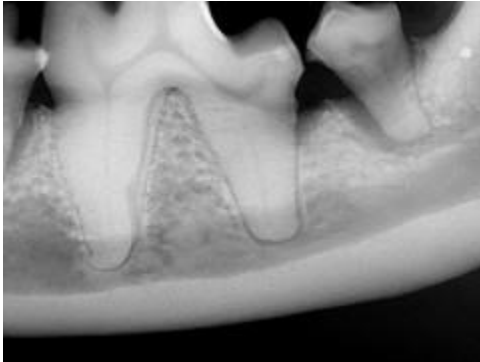


Cooper's lower incisor teeth

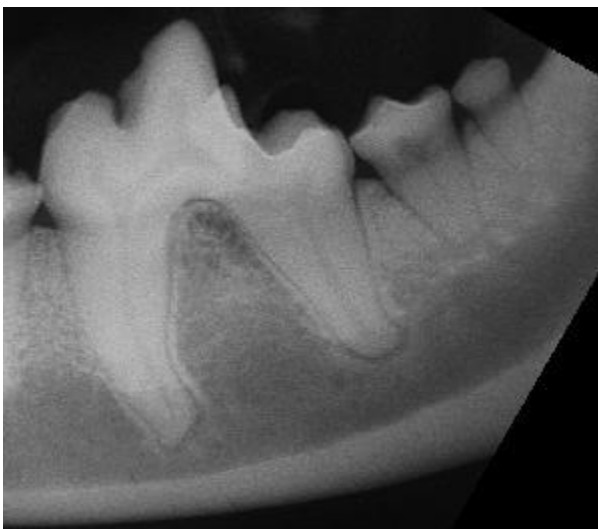


Normal lower incisor teeth

and at his left lower molar teeth (which look fine to the naked eye but had pockets of 4-6mm on probing).



For comparison, below is a radiograph of this region in a dog with no periodontal bone loss.



As you can see from the photographs, Cooper's mouth ***looked*** ok. But the radiographs tell the **whole** story, which is a diagnosis of severe, semi-generalized periodontitis. As a result of the periodontal bone loss, Cooper had to have 14 teeth extracted, and advanced periodontal therapy (scaling and root planing plus placement of an antibiotic directly into the pockets) at 5 additional teeth. With proper periodontal treatment rather than awake dental scaling, it is unlikely that Cooper's periodontal bone loss would have progressed to this level.



Here are a few of his extracted teeth. Notice the calculus ("tartar") on the root surfaces. This is all material that was missed by the person performing the "anesthesia-free dental cleaning".

In short, whether it is performed in a veterinary hospital or in a pet supply store or grooming shop, **anesthesia-free dental scaling provides minimal benefits to the pet's oral health**. Furthermore, it can actually harm pets by giving pet parents the false impression that they are providing for their pet's oral care, while periodontal disease can be rampant and undetected below the gumline. The only way to diagnose oral disease in dogs and cats is with dental radiographs, and periodontal probing. **The only way to effectively treat periodontal disease in dogs and cats is by scaling all surfaces of each tooth, above and below the gumline**, with a combination of specialized instruments which may include ultrasonic scalers, sonic scalers, and periodontal curettes. This requires general anesthesia.

Both the [American Animal Hospital Association](#) and the [American Veterinary Dental College](#) have position statements against the practice of scaling pets' teeth without anesthesia.

DOG DENTAL HYGIENISTS?



In the United States, each state's Department of Consumer Affairs oversees professions such as Medicine, Dentistry, and Veterinary Medicine. In order to be a licensed professional, individuals must graduate from an accredited professional school and pass both National and State examinations. This includes Medical Doctors (MD), Doctors of Dental Surgery (DDS), Registered Dental Hygienists (RDH), Doctors of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), and Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVT).

In the U.S. and Canada, there are neither accredited educational institutions nor licensing examinations for "veterinary dental hygienists". **Individuals referring to themselves as "dental hygienists for pets" are misleading the public and fraudulently representing themselves as educated professionals.** Similarly, some individuals use the title "veterinary dental technician". The "[American Society of Veterinary Dental Technicians](#)" requires only completion of a home study course, no hands-on experience or veterinary education, in order to issue the title of "veterinary dental technician". This title is not recognized by any state as allowing the person to perform procedures on animals. By comparison, to become a Registered Veterinary Technician, individuals must complete an accredited training program and pass a state examination.

In California, Registered Veterinary Technicians may perform scaling and polishing under the supervision of a veterinarian (which means the doctor must be on the premises at the time the procedure is performed). Each state has different regulations regarding who can



Milinda J Lommer, DVM, Dipl. DAVDC
Amy J Fulton Scanlan DVM, Dipl. DAVDC
Board Certified Veterinary Dental Specialists
Phone: 415-389-5917
Email: aggievtdentist@gmail.com

perform what dental procedures on companion animals. The link below is a summary of what each state specifies.

The following is a position statement released by the American Veterinary Dental College (AVDC), which certifies veterinarians as dental specialists:

This position statement 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 unanesthetized 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.



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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 unanesthetized 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, the AVDC recommends daily dental home care from an early age. 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 life-long oral health for dogs and cats.