



THE BARRACKS
VET SURGERY
MOSMAN

TEETH FOR LIFE - CATS

A cat's lifespan is now far longer given domesticity, modern medicine and nutrition meaning their teeth require a long term preventative program and care to go the distance - **prevention is fundamental**.

Kittens are born without teeth but within the first 2 – 3 weeks the deciduous (baby) teeth erupt. All the deciduous teeth are present by 6 – 7 weeks of age and an 8 week old kitten will have 26 teeth which will begin to fall out around 3 months of age. All of the adult teeth should have come through by 6 – 7 months of age with an adult cat having 30 teeth in total.

One of the main problems that develop with young kittens is retained deciduous teeth. This is where the adult tooth erupts beside the deciduous tooth (instead of deciduous tooth falling out before the adult tooth erupts in the same place). This occurs because the adult tooth is in the wrong position and it is important to ensure that you get the teeth checked whenever your kitten is at the vet. Any remaining deciduous teeth can be removed under anaesthetic, during the desexing procedure at 5 – 6 months of age.

Dental disease is an all too common problem and poor dental management equals poor dental hygiene. Unlike humans, fillings are often not an option, with extractions being the only solution. Amazingly, 85% of pets over 3 years of age suffer from periodontal disease which is usually in the form of gingivitis (inflamed gums). Plaque (a mixture of food particles, saliva and bacteria) is also a problem and it is this bacteria that causes so much damage. Bacteria entering the blood stream via inflamed gums will cause tooth decay and also damage the heart, liver and kidneys resulting in expensive veterinary bills for you but even worse, a much shorter life for your pet.

Kittens love to bite and chew and this should be encouraged to assist the development of healthy gums and teeth, however, commonsense should be used to prevent damage to teeth and gums, not to mention fingers and hands! Chewing for dental health is important and difficult to encourage in a cat. Due to domesticity which removed the need for hunting, the closest we can get is to feed them raw chicken necks (never feed cooked bones). Naturally these should **not** be the only source of nutrition for your cat as they do not provide a 'whole' diet and should be fed twice a week at most. For the purposes of dental health, soft and tinned food should also be avoided and only given occasionally as a treat. A recommended dry food such as Royal Canin, Hills Science Diet or a food of equal quality is ideal and will not only provide your cat with a healthy diet but will also help to clean and maintain healthy teeth and gums.

Please speak to your veterinarian or one of the nurses on duty if you require assistance or have any queries regarding the above information.