



## Montrose Pet Hospital

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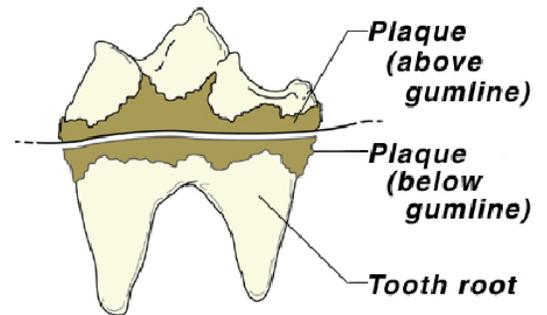
## Tartar Prevention in Cats

### How does tartar form, and what does it do?

*Plaque* is a gummy substance that forms on the teeth within a few hours after a meal. Within twenty-four hours, plaque begins to mineralize by combining with salts that are present in the saliva. As the plaque continues to accumulate and harden, it eventually forms tartar. Tartar can cause dental problems such as periodontal (gum) disease if not controlled.

**"If the tartar is not removed, it will cause the periodontal disease to progress, and the teeth will loosen and fall out."**

Tartar is harmful to the teeth and gums in two ways. First, it serves as a place where bacteria can grow and multiply in the mouth. Both the bacteria and the tartar cause inflammation of the gums, or gingivitis, that often results in bleeding. Worsening of the gingivitis leads to periodontal disease, which leads to further inflammation. There is substantial scientific evidence that the bacteria on the tartar can be absorbed into the blood stream and deposited in various organs, including the heart and the kidneys. Second, as tartar builds up along the gum line, it pushes the gums away from the roots of the teeth. As the gums recede, they expose the sensitive, enamel-free part of the tooth causing pain. Eventually, if the tartar is not removed, it will cause the periodontal disease to progress, and the teeth will loosen and fall out.



**Molar tooth with dental plaque**

### How can I prevent tartar formation on my cat's teeth?

After your cat's teeth have been professionally cleaned and polished by your veterinarian, we recommend beginning home dental care to help reduce plaque and tartar buildup. Some general tactics you can use to help reduce plaque and tartar buildup on your cat's teeth are:

- Feed your cat a veterinary-approved dental diet or a premium diet with scientifically proven tartar-reducing ingredients, such as Hills T/D. These diets have been shown to greatly reduce plaque formation and tartar buildup. These diets contain unique additives that interfere with plaque development, and each kibble is extruded or structured to promote the physical or mechanical removal of tartar when it is chewed. By limiting plaque as it forms, tartar development is greatly diminished.

**"Brushing should be done at least twice weekly."**

- Brushing your pet's teeth is another effective means of removing plaque before it turns into tartar. Since the cat's mouth is so tiny, it is necessary to use a specially designed toothbrush intended for use in cats. There are several different designs of toothbrushes that suit this purpose, including special brushes that will fit over your fingertip to make this task easier for you and your cat. Use enzymatic toothpaste that is designed for use in dogs and cats. Do not use human toothpaste, that is not intended to be swallowed and can cause intestinal upset. Brushing should be done at least twice weekly (preferably daily), but we understand that not all cats will tolerate brushing. An alternative is to place a small amount of toothpaste on your finger or the toothbrush and have your cat lick it off. Since cats have a more bristled tongue than dogs, this can be an effective alternative.
- Use a daily oral rinse. This type of product helps reduce the bacterial count in the mouth, resulting in improved breath.
- Have your veterinarian perform a prophylactic dental cleaning every six to twelve months, or at the first sign of tartar buildup. Regular dental cleaning is as important in cats as it is in people, and will prevent irreversible damage to the gums and roots.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM*

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