ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

Dear Dr. Schmidt,

My friend has a dog whose mouth seems to smell bad all the time, but my cat Quentin's teeth never to seem to be that bad. Don't cats get "bad breath" too? Shawn.

Dear Shawn, You bet they do. We know that 70-80% of dogs, by the time they're 3 years old, have some form of dental disease. It's been estimated in cats, that by the time they're 3 to 4 years old, 50% of them also have some form of dental disease. Cats however get an additional, unique kind of tooth disease that is very seldom found in dogs, known as "FORL's". That is, Feline Oral Resorptive Lesions. The tooth's enamel is eaten away usually at the gum line, much like a cavity that we get, and as it advances through the different layers of the tooth, causes great pain to the cat. If you touch these lesions with even the tip of a pen, their teeth chatter in pain. Some of them will even chatter while under anesthesia because they're so painful. Other signs you may observe are jaw spasms, increased salivation, oral bleeding, difficulty eating, and yes, bad breath if they become infected. Unfortunately these teeth will need to be fully or partially extracted, which causes even more pain your cat will need to go through. The exact cause for these lesions, believe it or not, is still not fully understood. However, we do know we can prevent these from developing by brushing your cat's teeth regularly . . . OK, you can stop laughing now! But seriously, with a lot of time, and a lot of patience, Quentin CAN be trained to have his teeth cleaned. Starting with training kittens early in life will definitely help later in life. Also, early and regular dental cleanings by your veterinarian can help prevent these from occurring too. Next time you come in, ask our doctors and nurses about other techniques that can help prevent these painful lesions from developing. Thanks Shawn, and enjoy those fresh kitty kisses while you can!

Dr. Doug

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