



Nine Steps of a Professional Dental Cleaning

Prior to a professional dental cleaning, a trained veterinary technician takes the patient's history and the veterinarian does a complete physical examination to assess the pet's health. The weight and temperature are recorded, and the patient's teeth, eyes, nose, throat, lungs, skin, musculoskeletal and nervous systems, and more are examined. Based on the physical exam findings and the procedures to be done, tests may be performed prior to the cleaning.

A proper general anesthesia protocol is chosen based on what the veterinarian finds during the physical exam and the patient's needs in order to provide the least health risk and effective pain control. While under general anesthesia, intravenous fluids are used to keep the organs healthy, and a trained veterinary technician monitors the patient. The patient is also kept warm using a safe and approved warming device throughout the procedure.

STEP 1: ORAL EXAM AND CHARTING UNDER ANESTHESIA

After the patient is anesthetized, the veterinarian performs a thorough oral exam, and the technician records information on the pet's oral health chart for future reference. Two charts are used: The anesthetic chart is a record of which medications are used and the details of the pet's monitoring history during the anesthetic procedure. The dental chart is a record of the details of the oral examination, review of radiographs, and which treatments were performed.

STEP 2: INTRAORAL RADIOGRAPHS

Intraoral radiographs reveal problems that cannot be seen during a visual examination, such as bone loss. Having a resource for examining the roots of all teeth helps the veterinarian diagnose problems and create a treatment plan. We cannot assume that dental disease is absent based on what we see above the gumline. Dental radiographs are the most economical technology for diagnosing problems in the roots and bone within the teeth as well below the gumline.

Full-Mouth Radiographs

When a professional dental cleaning is performed, full-mouth intraoral radiographs may be taken. The crowns and all the roots of each tooth can then be evaluated, abnormalities are identified and recorded, and a treatment plan for each tooth is determined. Full-mouth radiographs are also used to compare changes from year to year.

STEP 3: SCALING TEETH

This is the first step in the professional cleaning process that actually involves treatment. Scaling teeth removes tartar and plaque from the surface of the teeth above and below the gumline. If inflammation, bone loss, or deep pockets have developed around the teeth, this process can be painful, which is why general anesthesia and pain medications are required.



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STEP 4: POLISHING TEETH

After scaling, the teeth are polished. Polishing teeth removes any scratches due to scaling instruments and slows down the rate of attachment of bacteria to the crown.

STEP 5: SUBGINGIVAL IRRIGATION

Next, water irrigation under the gumline, which is called subgingival irrigation, is used to flush away all tartar and plaque from the gingiva (pockets), around the teeth, and from the surrounding oral surfaces.

STEP 6: APPLICATION OF ANTIPLAQUE SUBSTANCES

Some veterinarians apply antiplaque substances to the teeth following dental scaling and polishing, and some apply fluoride gel or foam. Others do not feel this is necessary. A special wax that has been shown to slow down the accumulation of plaque is available in some countries and can be applied to the enamel surface. This is applied after the fluoride treatment.

STEP 7: PROBING THE GINGIVA

The veterinarian next probes the gingiva, measures these in six areas around each tooth, and notes any abnormalities. A technician or assistant then records these measurements and any abnormal findings on the dental chart.

This step is done either after the teeth cleaning or before the teeth cleaning, depending on the veterinarian's preference.

STEP 8: DETERMINING A TREATMENT PLAN

After the teeth and gums have been thoroughly cleaned, the veterinarian treats any disease or abnormalities as determined by exam findings, radiographs, and probing the gingiva.

On completion of the above steps, the veterinarian has a much better idea of the health status of the pet and his or her mouth. Recommendations can then be made regarding further treatment, if needed.

STEP 9: HOME CARE

It's important to continue to take care of your pet's oral health at home. Your veterinary team will happily instruct your family on how to properly brush your pet's teeth and what you can do to maintain a healthy mouth between professional cleanings. Routine dental cleanings can help ward off future health complications such as heart disease while ensuring your pet has fresh breath and lives a long and healthy life!