

# VETERINARY

**Q** • My veterinarian has told me that my little 5 year old Yorkie needs a dental cleaning. This is something I have not heard before and I have had dogs for my whole life!! I am worried about the anesthesia - is it really necessary?

**A** • It is very likely that at 5 years of age your Yorkie does indeed require a dental cleaning. In fact, I would not be surprised to hear that he might even need some teeth pulled. Unfortunately, oral disease is one of the most common problems in dogs and cats. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, nearly 80 percent of all dogs and cats have signs of oral disease by age three.



**Christopher A. Lindquist** , VMD

Oral disease typically starts as gingivitis, inflammation in the gums which can be treated and reversed with plaque removal and control. However, without proper oral hygiene, gingivitis will progress to periodontitis - an irreversible disease where the supporting structures of the tooth are damaged. Symptoms include bad breath and swollen gums. This disease is very painful and will usually result in tooth loss.

Oral disease does not end in the mouth. The bacteria which accumulate under the gums during gingivitis and periodontitis can enter the bloodstream and damage vital organs such as the kidneys, lungs, heart and liver. The infection of a vital organ is a very serious matter. Infection in the kidneys can lead to kidney failure. Infected heart valves will fail to close properly leaving the heart unable to pump blood effectively. An infected liver may be left unable to detoxify the blood properly. In each of these all too common situations, you can see how oral disease, when left untreated, may become a life threatening problem.

There is no question that early detection and prevention of oral disease is essential to a happy and healthy life for your Yorkie. The good news is that with regular dental cleanings from your veterinarian and with proper oral hygiene at home, you will likely extend the life of your best friend. Please listen to your veterinarian's recommendation and have your dog's teeth cleaned. I know it can be concerning to have your best friend undergo anesthesia. However, it is essential to your dog's best chance for a long and happy life. To ensure that your dog is a healthy candidate for anesthesia, ask your veterinarian to perform preanesthetic bloodwork. Also, please remember to work on good oral hygiene at home with regular teeth brushing and dental treats. Thank you for your question and good luck in the battle against plaque.

Black Horse Pike **animal**  
**Hospital**  
The best care for your best friend

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