

Pet Health: Dental Cleaning



Anesthesia-Free Dental Cleaning

In the San Francisco area, a number of pet supply stores and grooming shops offer “anesthesia-free” teeth cleaning. Please review the following risks associated with this procedure before choosing it for your pet.

Dangers of Anesthesia-Free Dental Cleaning

Tartar and plaque are not just cosmetic problems, but often a symptom of disease. In a conscious patient, it is impossible to remove bacterial plaque from below the gum line. However, these bacteria ultimately lead to bone loss and the destruction of tooth-supporting connective tissue. Because it cannot remove this tartar and plaque, **anesthesia-free dental cleaning provides only cosmetic improvement and no medical benefits.** Any underlying bone loss remains undetected and untreated, allowing for the continued progression of dental disease.

Additional Risks

- **Patient Motion:** While your pet is partially restrained during the cleaning, any unanticipated motion can cause serious oral injury. Additionally, dental calculus (tartar) can be accidentally inhaled, causing severe complications and even death.
- **Inadequate Evaluation:** Imagine your own dental appointments and cleanings. Can you picture your pet—no matter how friendly and tolerant—allowing that kind of prolonged, flexible access to its teeth? If the person conducting the cleaning cannot see all the teeth and dental surfaces clearly, they will not be completely cleaned and evaluated.
- **Misdiagnosis:** The inability to perform a complete evaluation of the mouth can lead to misdiagnosing your pet’s oral health. You may believe your pet is healthy after a surface cleaning, but dental disease may still be present.
- **Unknown Accreditation:** Anesthesia-free dental cleaning is often performed by individuals who do not have a veterinary medical license. This is illegal and in violation of California’s Veterinary Practice Act. We urge you to research these individuals before making an appointment.

Dental Recommendations

We recommend regular dental examinations and cleanings to ensure your pet’s dental health. At the San Francisco SPCA Veterinary Hospital and at Pets Unlimited, we take every precaution to ensure that we perform every anesthesia procedure with the highest standard of care, following a custom tailored anesthesia plan for your pet and using state-of-the-art monitoring equipment to ensure its safety. In addition, our highly trained team of doctors and veterinary technicians will be present at all times during and after your pet’s procedure. **The safety of your pet while in our care is our highest priority.**