

NON-SPORTING GROUP

Tibetan Terriers

LATEST NEWS ON TT DENTAL CARE

The Tibetan Terrier breed standard allows for four different bites; a tight scissors bite, a tight reverse scissors bite, a level bite, and a slightly undershot bite. An overshot bite, a very undershot bite, or a wry mouth are considered to be faults.

Compared with other breeds, the standard

places little emphasis on teeth in the overall judging of a TT. It is interesting that in interviews with breeders over the years, however, one of the things repeatedly identified as something that has been improved in the breed is the teeth. Specifically, it seems dentition is more complete and bites are more consistent, with better placement of strong teeth while preserving the distinct curve in the jaws between the canines.

All good news! So it came as a surprise when a recent consultation with Naomi Hoyer, DVM, revealed that TTs were one of a few breeds she sees that have greater than average risk for periodontal disease and—more concerning—risk for early onset (at age 2–3 years!) of periodontal disease.

In both human and canine families, it is frequently observed that those with the best dental health do not always correlate to those with the best dental hygienic practices, while those who diligently tend to their oral health can still have a propensity to cavities and periodontal disease. There is new insight into that mystery. Research has discovered that periodontal disease for humans and canines has a genetic component.

Periodontal disease is now understood as an immune response running amok. It could be described as an allergy, in that genes (Del-1 and IL-17, specifically) that regulate immune

response to particular bacteria go haywire.

Scientifically stated, “periodontal disease is not fundamentally an inflammatory disease. It is a disruption of homeostasis. The disruption can set in motion a domino effect of infection, inflammation, and tissue destruction. In other words, once homeostasis is disrupted, all that follows is a symptom of that fundamental problem.” (The Science of Spotlight, “New Target for Periodontal Disease,” *National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research*, National Institute of Health, Online, Feb. 26, 2014)

A more complete explanation of periodontal disease process can be found [here](#).

Unexpectedly, plaque is not an accurate predictor of periodontal disease. Dr. Hoyer has seen dogs with heavy plaque but no periodontal disease. Likewise, perfectly white teeth can be casualties of periodontal disease when dental X-rays reveal advanced bone loss beneath a seemingly healthy tooth. Because Dr. Hoyer is seeing young TTs with very early tooth loss in her practice, it may be beneficial for breeders to discuss previously unexplained tooth loss in their dogs when exchanging pedigree information. Even if a young dog has strong teeth, full dentition, and a perfect scissors bite, this disease may still be developing. It seems prudent to avoid doubling up on early-onset

periodontal disease, though its heritability remains undetermined. Breeding decisions are complex, and the weighting of all variables is a thoughtful enterprise. But knowledge is power, and periodontal disease may be another factor to discuss.

What does Dr. Hoyer recommend for best dental care for TTs? Her most urgent advice is to get a full set of dental X-rays *by age 2 or 3* to discover if periodontal disease is already developing. Be attuned to symptoms. If there are unexplained loose, drifting, or missing teeth, these may be an indicator of the disease. A common symptom of the disease is bad breath. A board-certified veterinarian dentist is updated on latest research and treatments and seeking one out would be well advised.

Dr. Hoyer recommends to continue brushing teeth, though gauze squares or a washcloth will do the job, as they also provide an effective cleaning abrasion. There are dental sprays and gels available ([TruDog](#) sells several). They reduce the bacteria that can trigger the haywire immune response. Here is an [easy-to-make mouthwash](#) that is friendly to dogs and people.

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