



Ugly facts

Now that periodontal disease is known to play a significant role in the lives of modern pets, questions need to be asked. What are the consequences of this disease? What impact does periodontal disease have on the overall health, vitality and longevity of the sufferers? Given the magnitude of the problem you might expect to find plenty of information in the veterinary literature. At this stage the small amount of information tends to be hidden and requires interpretation.

This chapter will seek to reveal the hidden and clarify the inconclusive. Each aspect will be discussed separately; however, please keep in mind that nothing happens in isolation. In the living body a multiplicity of interactions bear on the final outcome.

Primary consequences

Asking pets affected by periodontal disease ‘How are you feeling today?’ cannot help us to understand their pain. Veterinary textbooks are not much help either. While they discuss development and treatment of periodontal disease, how the patient might feel is left unspoken. In attributing feelings to animals we should exercise care. But, in the absence of information to the contrary, feelings should be considered. As an added complication, human periodontal disease patients often feel no pain. Just as lepers may experience slow, painless erosion of nose and fingers, periodontal disease can erode the gums without the patient noticing.

But pain, severe pain, is a feature of periodontal disease for some human sufferers and I believe the same can be said for animals. We empathise with babies cutting their teeth one at a time and help them