



Vet ~~Pet~~

**Some people claim
feeding a natural,
With some pet food
for an investigation**

SEPTEMBER WAS PET SMILE MONTH and veterinary practices all over the country offered free dental check-ups to pets. Leaflets distributed to surgeries had pictures of rotten teeth and warnings of unseen dangers on them in a bid to shock pet owners and educate them about the importance of oral health.

Pet Smile Month has been held annually since 1999 when it was the largest veterinary health promotion ever held in the UK. Vets sign up to the initiative, and, during the month, offer free dental checks, give away goodie bags of dental products, and advise owners on plaque prevention. This year nearly 1,600 practices in the UK took part in Pet Smile Month, which accounts for 60 per cent of all vets.

High pain threshold

Research shows that more than 80 per cent of dogs and cats over the age of three years are suffering from periodontal disease to a degree that would benefit from treatment. Periodontal disease is a serious issue, as bad breath and a sore mouth are just the start of the problem. It is believed that bacteria can be spread via the bloodstream to other organs in the body, with the kidney and heart valves being particularly at risk. Recent research on human gum disease has shown that it increases the risk of heart disease and strokes, and it has even been linked to premature birth.

Pet Smile Month is organised by referral veterinary dentist Bob Partridge from Oak Beck Veterinary

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Smile Month

that commercial pet food causes untold dental problems and that unprocessed diet is the best way of achieving oral health. manufacturers sponsoring Pet Smile Month, one group calls into the vested interest involved...



Daz, a Staffordshire Bull Terrier by Tim Rose @ MDP (posed by a model)

Hospital in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Bob says that veterinary dentistry is important because many dental problems go undiagnosed for a long time. He said, "So many pets are suffering because they are incredibly stoic about discomfort and pain. Many dogs will carry on eating and therefore be perceived as healthy despite having the sort of dental disease that would have us running to the nearest dentist or A&E months before. The other huge factor is that dental disease is often hidden by the lips. Unless we actively look in our pets' mouths we will not appreciate the extent of the problem."

Kill then cure

According to Bob, the single most effective tool in the fight against plaque is the toothbrush and we should be brushing our pets' teeth as often as we brush our own. Bob says, "In a perfect world we should be brushing twice daily. In the real world, most owners are doing well with a once-daily regime and this is often adequate, especially when combined with a good diet and daily dental chews. If you brush your pets' teeth less than three times a week, you are probably giving little benefit."

With so many of our pets suffering from undetected dental disease, free veterinary check-ups seem like an excellent idea, but one group of dog owners is very sceptical about the motives behind the campaign.

Pet food manufacturers Royal Canin and Pedigree DentaStix

- Use a toothbrush that has been specially designed for pets' teeth.
- You must not use human toothpaste, as it is not designed to be swallowed.
- Pet toothpastes are highly palatable, so your dog will regard toothbrushing as more of a treat than a chore.
- Start when your dog is a puppy and make it fun. Older dogs can be easily trained to enjoy toothbrushing - but be patient.
- When you first start, let your dog play with the toothbrush, almost as a toy.
- Don't fight with your dog. If he wants to lick the toothpaste, that's fine, you can gradually increase the effectiveness of the brushing.
- Get your dog used to you lifting his lip and examining the whole mouth.
- Give a tasty reward afterwards.

For a more detailed guide to toothbrushing and a demonstration video, visit www.petsmile.org



Daz, a Staffordshire Bull Terrier by Tim Rose @ MDP (posed by a model)

sponsored this year's event and pet owners were made aware of it thanks to a £1million TV advertising campaign. Both companies sell products aimed at the prevention of dental disease, but they have been accused of contributing to the problem of periodontal disease with their processed foods.

The UK Raw Meaty Bones (UKRMB) Support and Action Group, as its name suggests, campaigns for natural feeding and the abolishment of commercial processed pet foods. Jackie Marriott from UKRMB is very outspoken about Pet Smile Month, as she believes that, as well as the pet food industry causing the problem in the first place, it is cashing in on the consequences with vets.

She said, "It's confidence trickery, pure and simple. Dogs and cats are cruelly made to consume junk food, giving rise to foul-smelling gum disease. Then an army of vets with plastic smiles and pound signs in their eyes front a scam to encourage expensive but defective treatments and bogus preventatives. There should be a high-level government investigation into what amounts to a massive commercial scam."

Tom Lonsdale, pioneer of the Raw Meaty Bones diet, has been promoting the effects of bones on oral health since the early 1990s and has been trying to get veterinary associations to take notice.

Care or cash?

In his book *Raw Meaty Bones Promote Health*, Tom says, "For domestic pets, the single most important factor which helps increase plaque accumulation on teeth is an artificial diet. People ask me what chemicals in artificial pet foods create the problem. I explain that while the sticky sugars and other chemicals may provide nutrients for bacteria, the main problem concerns the failure of the food to clean away the bacteria. Wolves hungrily tearing at a carcass gain a vigorous wash, scrub and polish of the teeth and oral cavity. Providing the time interval between feeds is not too great, the plaque can be kept at bay and the gums maintained in good health."

Having covered the bones debate extensively over the last few months in *Dogs Today* it is clear that the majority of vets do not condone the feeding of bones for a number of reasons, including the risk of choking and intestinal problems, but members of UKRMB believe that it is the vested

interest in the pet food industry that is causing them to promote artificial dental chews instead of bones.

"Pet Smile Month should be called Vet Smile Month," said Jackie. "Here we have the pet food companies and vets, mounting a nationwide campaign to cross promote their businesses. If this type of collaboration were happening in the human health profession, there would, quite naturally, be a massive public outcry, because we are repeatedly told that the way to good general health is to eat fresh produce at every opportunity. Imagine walking into a doctor's surgery to find the doctor giving away vouchers for free ready-meals or free samples of the best-known hamburger."

High finance

In promoting its Daily DentaStix range of chews, Pedigree conducted a survey, which revealed that three million dog owners in Britain are inadvertently but seriously harming their dogs by neglecting their oral health. It found that 77 per cent of dog owners consider their dogs' health to be as important as anyone else's in their household but 50 per cent had never cleaned their dogs' teeth.

In response to the survey, Clare Robertshaw from Pedigree said, "Our research highlights the fact that many dog owners are not as aware as they think they are about how to care properly for their dog. We hope our findings will prompt an increased awareness of this issue, resulting in less unnecessary suffering for both dogs and owners."

TV vet Scott Miller is Pedigree's face of the Pet Smile Month campaign. As well as telling dog owners to "avoid giving your dog bones - they cause problems such as constipation, as well as more serious problems that can be life threatening", he also advises dog owners to "prevent the onset of gum disease by feeding DentaStix on a daily basis". If the three million dog owners currently neglecting their dogs' oral health followed his advice, there would be a big increase in the sale of DentaStix.

On the Pedigree website you can ask Scott Miller a selection of questions from a drop-down menu. One of these questions is, "Dogs don't brush their teeth in the wild, why should I do it?" Scott's answer is, "Dogs in the wild eat prey and they are full of bones, they chew through

feather, they chew through skin and a result their teeth are kept nice and clean. Our dogs eat out of a bowl and that type of food accumulates along the gum line, causing a problem."

Jackie says that this shows vets are well aware that dental disease can be avoided by feeding raw meaty bones but it is not in their interests to advocate their use. Jackie said, "Clearly they are engaged in a massive hoax. They know their products are the main reason for the widespread cruelty and ill-health."

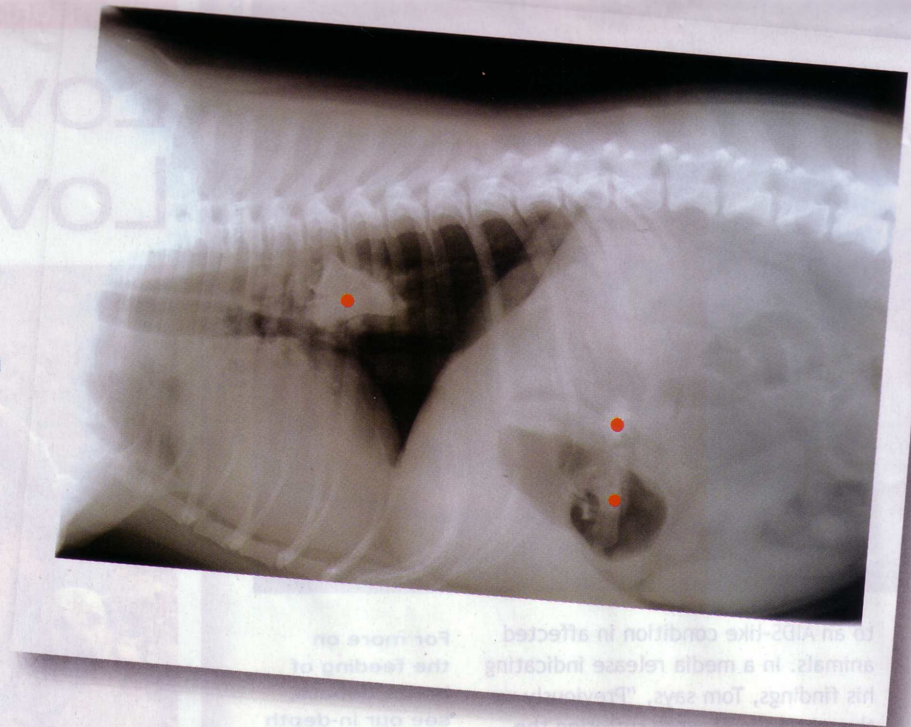
We did ask Pedigree if they would like to comment on these accusations, but at the time of going to print we had received no response.

Bob disagrees strongly with the suggestion that vets are influenced by the pet food industry and believes that vets would actually make more money if they began recommending bones to dog owners. "What really irritates me," said Bob, "is the comments that are made that vets are in the pay of the food companies because they advise feeding well-designed and prepared diets. Rubbish! We can probably earn more from dealing with all the problems caused by a diet of bones."

High risk factor?

Bob often sees cases of illness and injury caused by bones and advises his clients against giving them to their pets. One recent incident involved a bone becoming stuck in a dog's throat, which required surgery to remove it. "I spent many hours one night, together with two colleagues, operating on a dog who had a bone lodged in his oesophagus," recalled Bob. "Eventually we had to open up this poor dog's chest to remove this huge bone and then have the poor

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little thing in intensive care for the next few days to ensure that we didn't get complications. This little dog went through major life-saving surgery, with huge risks involved, simply because he had swallowed a bone. Most problems we see related to bones are not as dramatic as this, but we regularly see bones stuck in the roof of the mouth, leading to significant trauma to the gums. Dogs regularly break their teeth on bones, leading to tooth root abscesses. Dogs are often seen with diarrhoea from eating too much of the fatty marrow or with constipation from having faeces like concrete from the bone chips within them."

The Pet Smile Month initiative is also advertised as a good money-spinner for vets as it brings new clients to the surgery. The following is taken from the Pet Smile website. "In

addition, some of the pets that are presented for their Pet Smile check-up may have fallen out of normal veterinary care - vaccinations may have lapsed, flea control may not be present, they may not be neutered, other problems (behavioural, dermatologic, internal medicine, oncologic) may be present."

And if that wasn't incentive enough for a surgery to take part, there is the chance of an added bonus. Every Pet Smile check-up survey form returned is placed into a draw to win a hi-tech dental unit worth £3,000.

In response to this, Jackie said, "They present themselves as good Samaritans by offering free dental check-ups, but when the poor unsuspecting pet owner's attention is gained and defences are down, they promote utter garbage."

Tom Lonsdale talks about the products available to prevent periodontal disease in his 2005 book *Work Wonders*. He says, "In general, toothbrushes and dental chews represent failed artificial solutions for artificially created problems. Unfortunately, too many owners gain a false sense of security by believing the marketing hype. Would dentists promote carrot-shaped chews and plastic apples as tooth-cleaning aids for children and adults?"

Tom's concern for the oral health of our pets led him to undertake research into the effects of periodontal disease on the rest of the body. He concluded in 1996 that a diet of processed food produces periodontal disease, which often leads

Case study



Zac is a seven-year-old Staffordshire Bull Terrier-Bull Terrier cross. He has seen first hand what difference a diet of raw meaty bones has on teeth. For most of his life, Zac has followed the Raw Meaty Bones diet and his teeth were, until recently, so perfect that he had deceived more than one vet into thinking he was under three years old.

Zac's owner, Lee Yates, said, "Having snapped his lower right canine tooth about six months ago, the vet told us the tooth need not be extracted and to carry on as normal. Unfortunately for Zac, eating became very painful yet the vet still refused to extract the tooth, so he was switched on to canned food and kibble, expecting this to help him."

Lee had not realised how big a part the raw meaty bones played in Zac's oral health until he stopped eating them. Zac had been on the processed diet just a few months before he went to the vet for one of their free Pet Smile Month dental check-ups and the vet said Zac had plaque - something he had never had before. Lee said, "He developed fairly severe plaque accumulation and some tartar along the back teeth. I switched him back to raw meaty bones, and his teeth are almost perfect again, apart from the sore area at the front where he still refuses to chew, but a different vet has agreed an extraction is required."

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Bob, a Bearded Collie by Tim Rose @ MDP (posed by a model)

to an AIDS-like condition in affected animals. In a media release indicating his findings, Tom says, "Previously we thought animals were suffering the effects of old age when in fact they were wasting away with periodontal disease and diet-induced AIDS. Now we treat the periodontal disease and provide the pets with a natural diet. The removal of poisons allows the immune system to recover and owners frequently report that their old pet is like a puppy/kitten again."

Living longer

Instead of feeding bones, Bob would rather pet owners feed a good complete diet specially formulated to help teeth. He said, "There are now some properly tried and tested diets that are proven to reduce dental disease. The best diets work by having a physical structure designed to remove plaque and early calculus formations, having an ingredient to help reduce plaque itself. It is natural for dogs to eat bones, but in the wild they usually don't spend hours on end chewing them, they have to make another kill. Dogs in the wild have a life-expectancy of five years. This is natural. With such a short natural life-expectancy they do not have time to develop much dental disease. However, we want our pets to have an unnaturally long lifespan, we don't want them to die at five, we want them to live to 15. A well-prepared commercial diet from a reputable company is one way that we can help our pets to have an unnaturally long and unnaturally healthy life."

For more on the feeding of bones debate, see our in-depth investigation in the August 2006 issue. For more information on Tom Lonsdale's Raw Meaty Bones diet visit www.rawmeatybones.com or the support and action group's website at www.ukrmb.co.uk

