

Dental Health Issues are Most Commonly Diagnosed Disorders in Veterinary Medical Survey

KEY POINTS

- 31, 484 dogs and 15, 226 cats were examined at 52 private veterinary practices by licensed veterinarians
- Gingivitis and dental calculus were the most commonly reported disorders among all reported potential health issues
- Gingivitis – a component of periodontal disease – was found in 19.5% of dogs and 13.1% of cats examined
- Dental calculus – mineralized plaque – was observed in 20.5% of dogs and 24.2% of cats examined

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Introduction

A large survey (the National Companion Animal Study) was conducted by the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Minnesota in conjunction with the Advance Research Department at Hill's Pet Nutrition, Inc. and published in *JAVMA* in 1999¹. The purpose of this survey was to characterize the general dog and cat population (age, breed, sex, body condition, diet) and to determine the prevalence of the most common disorders and illnesses seen in dogs and cats examined at veterinary practices in the United States. In total, information was gathered on 31, 484 dogs and 15, 226 cats from 52 private practices and statistically analyzed.

Results

Population description: The median age for the dog population in this survey was 4.8 years and 4.3 years for cats. Over 77% of the cats and over 60% of the dogs had been either neutered or spayed. Most cats (>65%) were of the domestic shorthair variety and most dogs (27%) were mixed breeds. The majority of all dogs and cats received diets of popular dry foods with 33% and 26% receiving premium foods, respectively. The majority of the dogs and cats (60%) examined had a body condition score that was at – or just above or below – ideal weight, with the remainder of scores falling into a normal distribution pattern leaning more towards being overweight.

Disease prevalence: The most commonly reported health disorders in dogs and cats, in this large survey, were gingivitis and dental calculus. Gingivitis was observed in 13.1% of cats and 19.5% of dogs. Dental calculus – stony concretions of mineralized plaque adhered to teeth – was found in 24.2% of cats and 20.5% of dogs. When compared to the more traditionally more noticeable diseases and disorders such as external ear disease, dermatitis, flea infestation, allergies and lameness, dental/oral health problems ranked highest in prevalence. Only 7% of dogs and 10% of cats were considered a "healthy animal" during the study period.

Summary

In this study, gingivitis – a component of periodontal disease – and another oral health issue, dental tartar, were most prevalent disorders seen in dogs and cats. Veterinary literature has shown that dental disease can have both local and systemic effects on tissues and organs, including the heart, liver and kidneys.² Veterinary practitioners can use this information to educate their staff and clients about the importance of examining and recording the condition of the teeth and gums during routine physical examinations. The overall health status of dogs and cats can be improved by periodic

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prophylactic dental cleanings and routine home oral care. To date, no other study of this magnitude has been conducted that gathers similar comprehensive data from a large sample of dogs and cats in the general population.

References

- 1. Lund M, Armstrong PJ, Kirk C, Kolar LM, Klausner JS. Health Status and population characteristics of dogs and cats examined at private veterinary practices in the United States. *JAVMA* 1999;214:1336-1341.**
- 2. DeBowes LJ. The Effects of Dental Disease on Systemic Disease. *Vet Clin North Am Small Anim Pract* 1998;28:1057-1062.**

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