

PET TALK TUESDAYS – 3/3/2020

Nick Rusch:

The first Tuesday of the month. That means it's the day we spend some time with our friend, Dr. Marty Greer from Veterinary Village in Lomira. It's Pet Talk Tuesday. Doc, how you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great, thanks.

Nick Rusch:

Good, good. Good to have you along. It is Dental Health Month for pets.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is, and for us too. But-

Nick Rusch:

For us too? I didn't realize that, okay.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, for people. But I don't really know anything about dental care in people other than you need to floss. So there's my entire human side.

Nick Rusch:

That's all right. Nice little tip of the hat. I appreciate that. I'm sure they do too.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But for our pets, there's lots of things we can do for their dental health. Of course, people think that just tossing them some kind of a treat is going to solve their problem. But when you go to the dentist, they don't tell you that if you just chew gum or if you just eat a piece of cheese, that that's going to take care of your dental healthcare, right?

Nick Rusch:

Sure, sure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So we should know from that experience that brushing is always the best way to manage our dogs' and cats' healthcare for their teeth. Really, their oral care plays a huge role in their overall health as well. We see heart disease, kidney disease, all kinds of associated disorders from the bacteria that develop in the mouth. It's not just bad breath. It's loose teeth, it's bacterial showers that end up causing infections on the valves of the heart, infections in the kidneys, just lots of places. So we really need to look more seriously at our pets' healthcare.

Nick Rusch:

If you're talking about good oral hygiene for your dog or cat, where do you start? I'm guessing you've got to get the proper brush. I know they make pastes or powders for them, just like they do for humans.

Dr. Marty Greer:

They do. The best place to start is when they're young. When they're young and they're puppies and they still have nice, shiny, white teeth, get them used to brushing their teeth. Get them used to a toothbrush, the feel of a brush. They make a regular toothbrush. For cats, they make a little tiny toothbrush that fits beautifully in their mouth with a little angle on the head. You can get the little brushes that go on your fingertips, so you can get your finger in there.

A lot of people are a little overwhelmed by trying to brush their pet's teeth, because they feel like they can't open their pet's mouth. Well, really, you don't need to. They have pointed teeth, we have flat teeth. We're omnivores, they're carnivores. So we have a different shape to our teeth. All they need to do is get the toothbrush on the surface of the tooth on the outside where the lips touch the teeth. If you can just slide the toothbrush in along that side on both the right and the left, upper and lower, you can do that without prying their mouth open, without looking at their teeth.

You know what it feels like when a toothbrush is on your tooth, because you've been doing it for as many years as you've been alive minus about two. But after that, all you need to do is get the toothbrush in there, start brushing. Then once they're accustomed to the feel of the brush, you can start with the toothpaste. They make really nice enzymatic toothpastes that are flavored for pets. They don't like mint. Dogs and cats don't like the flavor of mint.

Nick Rusch:

I would guess they wouldn't.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, no.

Nick Rusch:

Mint may not be the best thing for them?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's not. They don't like the taste of it. Catnip is related to mint, but it doesn't have the same characteristics as mint. They also don't like toothpaste that foams up, because they don't-

Nick Rusch:

I believe that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

... rinse and spit, right?

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

If they swallow their toothpaste and it's foamy, they'll get an upset stomach. If they swallow a regular dog toothpaste or cat toothpaste, they won't.

Nick Rusch:

It won't matter, yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. It's more similar to children's toothpaste.

Nick Rusch:

What flavors do they come in for dogs and cats?

Dr. Marty Greer:

You'd be surprised.

Nick Rusch:

Liver?

Dr. Marty Greer:

They make them a beef flavor, a poultry flavor, a malt flavor, and then they make a vanilla mint. Which I think they all taste fairly similar. They make a seafood flavor.

I've tried them, of course. I'm going to taste them. If it's good enough for my dog to have in her mouth, then I'm going to taste it. I think they all taste kind of sweet, so I don't find them to be objectionable. I don't find them to be something I use daily, but I don't think they're objectionable.

We like mint and we like foaming because we feel like foam, it's like suds in your dish sink, it means you're getting clean well. There's no association with that in pets. So they don't need a foamy toothpaste and they don't need a mint flavor toothpaste.

Nick Rusch:

How often are we talking? How often should this be done?

Dr. Marty Greer:

In a perfect world, you would brush their teeth once a day. I'm pretty happy if a client can get their pet's teeth brushed once or twice a week. That's going to still make a big impact in their overall health.

The littler dogs tend to have more dental disease than big dogs. So Labradors, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, they tend to have a lot less dental disease overall than the small breeds of dogs.

The thing with small breed dogs is they have the same size teeth as the big dogs, but they all got crammed together and crowded in when we scaled down the size of the dog. Their teeth didn't get as much smaller as their heads did. So they get crowded, rotated. Especially you get the really short face, the brachycephalics like the Pugs, the Bulldogs, the Shih Tzus. They really have a lot of crowding. And then, of course, that increases the amount of dental disease that they have.

Nick Rusch:

Now, particularly with dogs, I think that what we've always heard or what we've always been led to understand over years is that a dog's saliva is a panacea, that a dog's mouth is a place that's a clearinghouse for germs.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, it's pretty much a sewer. And cats are even worse. Yeah, there's things in a cat's mouth that God doesn't even know about. The only bite worse than a cat bite is a human bite. So you just don't want to assume that they're healthy. You know they go out in the yard and they eat really disgusting things.

Nick Rusch:

Many dogs will eat just about anything.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, yeah. After they go out and eat rabbit droppings or clean the cat litter box for you, and then they come in and give you a big slurp across the cheek. No. That is not a clearinghouse. That is a sewer. Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

So where does that come from? Because I mean, we were told that forever.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I don't know, because it really isn't true. You can culture all kinds of really nasty things. I've had enough dog bites and cat bites to know it's not.

Nick Rusch:

See, this is why we chat, because-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

... you're the clearinghouse for me.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Well, I've been bitten way too many times. In fact, the last time was Sunday.

Nick Rusch:

Oh no.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, just a small, glancing bite.

Nick Rusch:

Oh no.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But nevertheless-

Nick Rusch:

I hate to see that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, these guys are serious. They tell us not to touch them and they give us a warning. They hiss, or they growl, or they curl their lip and they say-

Nick Rusch:

Then you do it anyway.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, and we continue to do it. Yeah. Not only do we do that, but then we stick a needle in them. Then they don't understand why if all those warnings were given, we're stupid enough that we kept doing it anyhow. Yeah, they do have pretty nasty things in their mouths. So you need to wash their food and water bowls, throw them in the dishwasher, keep those clean, do the toothbrushing.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And then there are treats and powders and products that do help, but they're not a replacement for toothbrushing. They do make enzyme-based chews for dogs. There's tons and tons of different things on the market that have come out over the last probably 20 years when dental care really started to come into its own in veterinary medicine and we started to realize the importance of it. But there's also probiotics that you can use. There's one called TEEF!, T-E-E-F. It's teeth like you have a lisp, TEEF. That's developed by a PhD microbiologist that helps to establish the correct bacteria in the mouth. We can use antibiotics that help.

But really the bottom line is if they have enough tartar on their teeth that you can see it, it's time for a dental cleaning. That requires full anesthesia for your dog or your cat. Because let's face it. They're not going to sit in the chair and open their mouth and say, "Ah," and let us do the things that happen when we go to the dentist. In fact, even people end up with sedation dentistry in some cases, because they're nervous about being at the dentist. We use ultrasonic cleaners, which make funny noises and feel funny. Our pets aren't going to allow us to do a good job of scaling and prophying the teeth if they're not anesthetized.

Nick Rusch:

I'm glad you brought that up, because my question is now let's say that we are pursuing a good course of canine or feline dental care, by and large do most of the doggies and kitties hold still for it pretty good? I mean, we're talking about now just the general cleaning you do at home. I know they all have different personalities, but by and large is it not a big thing for them?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It depends on how used to it they are, and what the other rewards are that go with it, and how you approach the situation. If you give them a little bite of cheese afterwards, they're going to look forward to it. We have clients that their dog comes in the bathroom with them every morning and they're used to seeing them brush their teeth, and then they wait for their teeth to be brushed. So you can train that.

The easiest way to take care of the small dogs and the cats are to put them on a countertop or the washing machine, the dryer, put down a bath mat that's non-slip, and then put them up there, because they're not going to scoot around as much as if you try and chase them around on the floor or the couch. That doesn't work. You're destined to fail miserably at that. Then you'll be swearing at me and wondering what I was talking about.

I actually do have one client who can floss her cat's teeth.

Nick Rusch:

Really?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I have seen her do it in my exam room. She gets out the dental floss and she flosses the cat's teeth.

Nick Rusch:

And the kitty thinks that's just fine.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, because he got used to it when he was little. So you can do amazing things with the right training and the right amount of patience and if you have the time to do it.

Now, if you're chasing three kids and you're trying to get them to soccer, and to basketball, and to play practice, and all the other things that go along with feeding and caring for a raft of little kids, and you can barely get them to brush their teeth, doing the dog just seems like one more thing that isn't going to happen. So that's why some of these chews can be helpful. But like I said, they're never going to be a replacement.

The more dental care you provide your pet with brushing, flossing, and some of these other things, the less expensive it is for you to get their dental care from us. Because that means instead of doing their cleanings every six to 12 months,

you may do one in their lifetime. You may not do any if you've done a great job. I can tell. People think that you can't tell.

Nick Rusch:

Of course you can tell. Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Of course you can tell.

Nick Rusch:

Well, you're looking at it every day. Of course.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Yeah, but they think they can... It's like when you go to the dentist and you say-

Nick Rusch:

You can't fool anybody.

Dr. Marty Greer:

... "I floss." And they say, "Yeah, right." They know if you do good dental care or not. They know if you brush your teeth and you do all the other things. They know if you smoke. They know if you drink coffee. They know if you drink tea. I was just at the dentist. I have some recent first-hand human experience. So they can really tell the difference.

Nick Rusch:

Of course they can.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We can too as veterinarians. So it's really lovely for me to open the mouth of a dog, or flip their lip and take a look and say, "Wow, these look great. What do you do?" We do know the difference.

Nick Rusch:

Of course you do.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

Let's talk about... You mentioned some of the other products available. We always used to hear, hear again, years ago, we used to hear about the, "Buy..." I'll use a brand name just because they relied on it. They advertised it. Not so much anymore, but yeah. "Get Milk-Bone. It helps to clean your dog's teeth." Remember that?

Dr. Marty Greer:

They advertised it, but it wasn't something that held up. Because when you bite into a Milk-Bone, it shatters. So it doesn't really have any effect of squeegeeing the tartar off the teeth.

There is a Hill's pet food that's called t/d, tooth diet. It does work. Instead of falling apart, it has a double screw extrusion process by which they do the formation of the kibble. It's sort of like a Triscuit or a shredded wheat, that those fibers are all lined up.

Nick Rusch:

Got it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

When they do that, then that helps to squeegee the tartar off the teeth. So those do make a difference.

Most of the Eukanuba and Royal Canin foods have sodium methyl phosphate in it. That's a little crystal, the same crystal that's in your Crest or your Colgate toothpaste to help clean the teeth. So there are products on the market that we use every day and may not even think about it.

Frankly, Milk-Bones don't work. There's C.E.T. Chews, which have an enzyme in them. There's a lot of other products that are really safe. You do want to make sure that anything that you give to your dog to chew on is safe. That they're not going to have a choking hazard, or it's going to cause any kind of obstruction. For a while, there was some products on the market that there were concerns about. Those have been pulled and reformulated. So most everything, Greenies and the C.E.T. Chews and those equivalent products are very safe. But you still need to be really careful with the use of them so that your pet doesn't get into trouble with them.

Nick Rusch:

Sure. Anything else we need to be concerned about seasonably as we... I mean, we're coming along into spring here.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, we're getting into that weather where fleas and ticks are going to start to be out, and mosquitoes are going to start to show up, so remember to get your pet's heartworm test done, get them started on their flea and tick medication, dogs and cats. Even if the cats don't go outside. If your dog goes out and comes in with little critters, they can hop on to your cats. So remember those things. We are offering a \$10 discount for Dental Health Month for dental cleanings.

Nick Rusch:

That's great.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So there's certainly a lot of things to think about this time of year. And we have our upcoming health clinic at the veterinary clinic this weekend on Saturday. We have an ophthalmologist, and a cardiologist coming in for our breeders and for anybody else that wants to do any kind of evaluation of their pets, just to see what things look like. They're reduced prices for the ophthalmologist and the cardiologist to see their pet. So it's pretty cool. It's an opportunity for our breeders and other people in the community to have evaluations done. Last year, we had our new Lomira police dog come in for his eye exam.

Nick Rusch:

Very cool.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, yeah. So there's very cool things that we do. It's a twice a year event at our practice, and we have about an extra 400 dogs coming through the practice that day. It's-

Nick Rusch:

Sort of a hectic day for you.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's a shindig. Yeah, yeah.

Nick Rusch:

Is it chaos?

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, because Katie is so organized, and our clients have all done it before, and so have the veterinarians, our ophthalmologists and cardiologists.

Nick Rusch:

I wasn't thinking from your standpoint. I'm not worried about how well you run the practice, doc.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, no.

Nick Rusch:

I was thinking about 400 dogs. That's what I was thinking about.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Katie's got it so well-orchestrated that they come in, they know what they're supposed to do, where they're supposed to go. She's got it down. We've done this for about 12 years.

Nick Rusch:

I wasn't questioning your capabilities.

Dr. Marty Greer:

This is about our 25th health clinic, so we got it figured out.

Nick Rusch:

Well, that's very cool. And that's a lot of animals to look at in a day.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is, it is.

Nick Rusch:

In a way I'll bet you that's fun though too, right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's a blast. It's really something we should be proud of that our breeders in our community are standing up and doing their health screenings, and they're providing us with puppies that are health screened before we think about purchasing them. So it's just one less thing to go wrong, because genetically they're breeding the best dogs that we can. So that's the really great thing about purebred dogs and dogs that come from our breeders. Purpose-bred dogs are...

The importance of health screening instead of just randomly getting something. I'm not saying anything negative about rescue.

Nick Rusch:

No, no.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's just less predictable with a rescue dog than it is with a dog that's had health screening.

Nick Rusch:

You hope you know what you're getting into, but you don't always know.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You don't know.

Nick Rusch:

This is one way to know.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. Reduces the risk, the role of the dice.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. Yeah. 400 dogs.

Dr. Marty Greer:

400 extra dogs.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, right. But I mean, I see people all the time on the bike trail. Sometimes I'll see somebody... One lady walks. She's got three Border Collies, and all I can say to her... They're beautiful. I mean, they're clearly extremely well taken care of. But they're Border Collies. They need to be stimulated every second of every day. All I can say when I see her, I always say, "You've got your hands full," because she does. Even though they are clearly well-behaved. There's no issues with them, but I just know. They're Border Collies.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. She has spent a lot of time getting them to be well behaved.

Nick Rusch:

To that point.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. They didn't just pop out that way. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

For sure.

Nick Rusch:

My other favorite one on the bike trail is sometimes I'll see somebody and they're walking down the middle of the trail and they've got two dogs. One's going one way and one's going the other. And here I come at 18 miles an hour, and what am I supposed to do now?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I know. Which direction is safe?

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. Just kind of be aware of that on the bike trail. Bikers, try to be considerate of animals and let people know that you're coming up on them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, but ringing your bell and yelling is... You've got to be a little cautious how you-

Nick Rusch:

Well, typically, I usually try and say, "On your left."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. That is helpful.

Nick Rusch:

Sometimes when people have the earbuds in, it ain't getting home. But-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, the earbuds have become a concern. Driving, biking, all those things. Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

They are to me, because I would never wear them because I need to hear the traffic behind me. I'm on the road. When I say on the road, I am literally on the road. I don't want to be on the road face first.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No.

Nick Rusch:

So you typically... I like them out. But I have noticed that people running, walking their dogs sometimes will have earbuds. Maybe in one ear, but not the other. Maybe that's the way to go. I don't know.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, but you still miss part of what's going on around you. They do make some nice neckwear as well now. I have a Bose, and they're great because it doesn't block the sound.

Nick Rusch:

Well, you weren't messing around then. You went and bought the good stuff.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, you're only going to buy one, so buy the right one.

Nick Rusch:

Buy the right one. Well, tell us about contact information. Once again, let's plug the health clinic on Saturday.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. Health clinic on Saturday goes from 9:00 until 4:00. If you need an appointment for that, you can email us at vv@k9stork.com, or give us a call at (920) 269-4000. Easy number. Our website is smallanimalclinic.com, in case you can't spell Veterinary Village, because either one will get you there. But it's easy to spell small animal clinic.

We're at the corner of Highway 41 and 49. The big red building and the two little blue buildings associated with them, that's Veterinary Village at the corner of 41 and 49, across from Quad/Graphics. We're there seven days a week. But Saturday only for the health clinic, because it's 400 extra dogs.

Nick Rusch:

Extra dogs. Extra. Just in case you didn't have enough dogs around.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, exactly.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. It's always a great pleasure to talk to you, doctor. We want to remind everybody once again, not just this month, but every month, take care of the dogs' and cats' teeth.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You got it.

Nick Rusch:

It's big. Big thing. Can make them last a lot longer. After all, that is, we would hope, the plan.