

## Pet Talk Tuesdays – 2/2/2021

**Nick Rusch:**

Time for Pet Talk Tuesday. Joining us via the telephone from Veterinary Village in Lomira, our friend, Dr. Marty Greer. Dr. Greer, good morning. How you doing?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

I'm doing great. Thank you.

**Nick Rusch:**

Great to have you back. Well, it's the time of year where I know, and especially with the weather we've got coming later on this week here, it seems more and more difficult to get the pets outside. My wife always jokes, when we drive by somebody walking a dog, it's like, the dog just looks miserable. He wants to get back in as soon as possible.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

It's a little chilly right now. Their little feet get cold. They try to stand on two feet. It's pretty tough, but you still got to go. There's only so much you can do. You just need to keep those walks short and bundle up well. The weather that I think actually is most dangerous for the dogs is right where the temperature is slushy, the ice is slushy on the ground. That's where I tend to see the most frostbite. Yes, it's really cold when they're in this sub 30-degree temperature and the snow is up on their legs. Those are quick trips in and out. But when you're out shoveling and it's slushy and the dog's out there for an hour, that's where we see the frostbite that really happens. So be really careful of that.

**Nick Rusch:**

You have to be conscious when the dog's out, because he's out supervising and he wants to be where you are. He might not be thinking about the fact, "Hey, I'm really starting to get cold here."

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

No, they don't really have much for judgment. But the other really important thing about February is, February is Dental Health Month, not just for people, but for our pets, too.

**Nick Rusch:**

What can we do to make sure that they have good dental health?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Well, there's lots of good things that you can do at home, starting when the dogs are young. Start your puppies off with getting accustomed to a toothbrush or a finger brush in their mouth, so that they're accepting of the mechanical motion and the feel of a brush or a gauze on your finger in their mouth. After you get them used to that, then you can start them on toothpaste. You don't want to use human toothpaste, because it's very foamy. When dogs swallow that foam, they get an upset stomach. The fluoride isn't good for their tummies either. They don't know how to rinse and spit. At least, I have yet to see a dog rinse and spit. We want to make sure that we're using a veterinary grade toothpaste. Now, they do say things like beef and shrimp on the label. I've tasted them. I don't think they taste like beef or shrimp. I think they just taste kind of sweet, but they don't taste bad. We can get our pets accustomed to those toothpastes and get them started young.

There's also some really good dental chews on the market. You've got to be careful of the really, really hard ones that tend to fracture teeth. We see a lot of broken teeth on bones and antlers and things like that. We see broken and worn teeth, but there are appropriate chew toys for dogs. Then, of course, there's great dog foods that have things in them to help with dental health. But bottom line is, if you don't start young with good dental care, we're going to end up needing to put your dog under anesthesia and do a good dental cleaning, or cat, do a good dental cleaning on them when they become middle-aged.

**Nick Rusch:**

There used to be a brand name and I won't bring up the name, but there used to be. They marketed it as good for your dog's dental health, many years ago. That brand may still exist. I don't know. I'm not sure how effective that is when you talk about the chews. Is that something that you want to... You probably want to check out the brands with your vet.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Right. Right. We carry some. A lot of the veterinarians carry one that has an enzyme in it that helps to clean the teeth. That's called CET, the three letters, C-E-T. Those enzymes really do help more than just the chewing effect. People are like, "Well, do I really have to brush their teeth?" And you say, "Well, does your dentist really tell you, you should brush your teeth? Or do they tell you, you can just chew a piece of gum every day and you'll be fine. Don't worry. Don't brush. Don't floss. You'll be okay." Of course, they're going to not tell you that, because that's not good for your dental health. It's not good for our pet's dental health either.

**Nick Rusch:**

I'm sure you've seen everything all over the scale at the practice. I mean, you've probably seen a dog where it's remarkable how good their dental health is. And you've probably seen others that it's remarkable how good they aren't.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Right. I actually have one client whose daughter taught her cat to let her floss her teeth. People can go to real extremes. I've seen this cat sit on the exam table and have its teeth flossed. I'm like, "Hmm, look at that. Puts the rest of us the shame, doesn't it?"

**Nick Rusch:**

You don't anticipate the kitty putting up with that for very long, do you? I mean, man alive.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

No.

**Nick Rusch:**

That's incredible.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

No, but he does. He's a really nice little cat and he lets her do it. There's a lot of things we can do if we just put our minds to it and we're willing to spend the time and the effort to do so. But the bottom line is, people are reluctant to anesthetize their pets when they become older. Even though we know it's safe. We do blood work. We could do EKGs. We're monitoring them constantly while they're under anesthesia. It still makes them nervous to have an anesthetic procedure done. I understand why. I'm not trying to dismiss that as being inconsequential, because it is a big deal. But if you're really hardcore against it, then you need to start good dental health care when your pet is young. By the time the tartar is accumulating on their teeth, it's too late. You can't get that tartar off with a toothbrush. You're going to have to start young and keep the plaque from turning into tartar.

When it's first forming, it's plaque. Then when it gets hard, it's tartar. You want to make sure that you're not letting it advance to that point, by doing all the appropriate things. There are water additives, some work, some don't. There's a product on the market called TEEF, T-E-E-F, that is put together by a PhD biochemist to help change the bacterial environment in the mouth to reduce the development of tartar and plaque. There's a lot of good products on the market and that you can use. The main thing is that you're actually doing something and you're paying attention to what you're doing.

I am constantly amazed by how bad dogs' dental health is. Then the owner comes in to pick them up after their dental cleaning and they're like, "Oh, I really missed her. She always sits on my lap at lunch and we eat lunch together. She eats off my fork." And I'm like, "Oh man, did you notice how bad those teeth are? You're putting that fork in your mouth, too?" I've seen it, man. It's rough.

**Nick Rusch:**

I've seen that action, too. I mean, I grew up with animals and I love my dogs and my kitties, but you know what? We didn't really take it that far.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

No, no. You got to draw a line. But if you're that close to your pet, you should be able to smell the bad breath. And the breath is because of the bacteria in the mouth. It's not just the tartar. There's bacteria growing in their mouth, under their gumline and it's really unhealthy for them. It's super important that we do a good job, because it's not just dental health, it's their kidneys, it's their hearts, it's their livers. It's a whole system that's drug down by the bacteria that are in the mouth. And it's the same for us. If you watch the commercials on TV, they talk about how important dental health is to your health. So take that seriously.

**Nick Rusch:**

I would guess, and I'm somebody, I have horrible fine motor skills. That's just what I am. I would guess that for cats and small dogs, this has got to be probably a little bit more of a challenge than for bigger animals.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Well, they do tend to accumulate tartar more quickly than the bigger dogs. I think it's because the larger dogs, the Labs and the Golden Retrievers and those bigger breeds tend to be more aggressive chewers. They tend to chew their kibble and it tends to help scrape the tartar off the teeth. There are some products on the market, like I said, that are, even dog foods, that contain a dental care product. There's one that has a crystal in it. It's the same crystals that they put in our toothpaste, to cut down on tartar accumulation. You can look at the labels for those. Those are usually the IAMS and Eukanuba products.

Then Hills has a TD product, T stands for teeth or tooth diet or tartar diet. Those are large kibbles that have... The fibers in the kibble are lined up with a double through extrusion process, like Triscuits and Shredded Wheat have all the fibers all lined up one way, so that when the dog bites into it, it doesn't just shatter in their mouth, but it scrapes the tartar off their teeth as they chew. There's some cool stuff out there, that if you're talking to your veterinarian about some suggestions, you can actually get some pretty good ideas of things that you can do that cut down on the amount of tartar that's accumulating, or to keep their mouth healthy once you've had that dental cleaning so that you don't have to continually do it.

If you don't do anything with good dental health, typically pets need dental cleanings every six to 12 months. People come in and they're like, "I just did that." Well, you just did that, but then you didn't continue to follow it up with the good oral hygiene products that you need at home. I can't fix what you're doing. And even when you take them to the groomer, they're like, "The groomer brushes their teeth." Well, that's every six weeks. Again, when you go to the dentist, they don't say every six weeks to brush your teeth is adequate. You know and I know that flossing and brushing are essential. We know from dental health studies that in people, people who floss their teeth live six years longer. That's a big deal. So if we can do little things for our pet's health, for their oral health, it's going to make a big difference in their longevity.

**Nick Rusch:**

So, doctor, what do you recommend? How often do you recommend brushing your dog's teeth?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Ideally, every day. Realistically? Once a week is better than not doing it at all. If you brush your dog's coat and you trim their nails and you do those other kinds of things on a weekly basis, that's a great time to do it. Every six weeks just isn't often enough to really maintain good oral health. The groomers are not allowed to do dental cleanings. They may brush their teeth, but they are not allowed to do dental cleanings. So it is really important that you are working with a veterinarian, and a groomer if you have a pet that needs to be groomed, that are all on the same page as far as what kind of oral health care we can do. If you just scrape their teeth, if you just get a tartar scraper and scrape them, you actually make the tartar accumulate more quickly, because you've roughened the surface of the tooth. At the end of a dental cleaning, when veterinarians do it, they polish the teeth.

You know that stuff that your dentist uses that when they're done cleaning your teeth, it feels like you've just had Comet put in your mouth, because it's crunchy and gritty and, unfortunately, pink flavored? That's called prophylaxis paste. We do that on our dogs at the end of the dental cleanings, as well so that we smooth the surface of the tooth back down and slow the re-accumulation of tartar by doing that prophylaxis step.

**Nick Rusch:**

If we're brushing our animal's teeth at least once a week, how often should we have the real cleaning by you?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

That's going to depend on how fast they accumulate tartar. Every pet's a little bit different. Some dogs accumulate tartar really quickly, or they end up with a lot of gingivitis, inflammation of the gums, cats as well. Cats are interesting creatures. They get cavities, dogs don't. But cats get cavities. They're called carious lesions. Those can cause such severe damage to the teeth that they actually fracture off, because their teeth aren't very big to begin with. So you put a hole in the middle of that tooth, and pretty quickly that tooth weakens and fractures, and then there are roots left under the gum line and then they're painful. You really have to look at, is your dog or cat painful when they chew? Do they only chew on one side of their mouth? Do they drop food when they're chewing? Do they seem uncomfortable? Are they wincing when you reach toward one side of their face to pet them?

There's a lot of clues that you need to look for, but there's not a one size fits all recommendation for dental care. Some people have to go to the periodontist every three months, because they have a tendency to have periodontal disease. Everybody needs their own treatment care plan. We can't just say once a year is good for everybody, because some pets are great and some owners are great and we just never have to do it. My favorite clients, I'm going to be really honest with you, my favorite clients are the dental hygienists, because they are just fastidious about their dog's oral and their cat's oral health. They are the ones who will brush religiously. Even some of the dentists aren't quite as good as the dental hygienists. That's our little secret. Don't tell anybody ok?

**Nick Rusch:**

Oh, no. I wouldn't say a word.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

But the dental hygienists are great. Next time you go have your teeth done, ask your dental hygienist if she has any pets and talk to her about what she does for her pets, because you're going to be really surprised at how good their oral health is, because they see the impact of bad oral health every day, that's what, they sit in the chair. And when you say, "Ah," and they're working on your mouth, they are intimately associated with bad oral health. They're the ones who really appreciate the importance of it for their pets, as well. Those are the ones that I just absolutely love. I know when I flip the lip on those, I'm going to see a good situation.

**Nick Rusch:**

Fantastic. Are there other resources? I mean, because I know you're always finding people always look everything up online and sometimes the information they get is bad. And sometimes the information they get is good. When we talk about dental health for dogs, outside of the brushing, hopefully, once a week or more often, and the cleaning at your office, when needed, are there other things that people should be doing?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Really the water additives, many of them don't work very effectively. We want to be careful that we're not getting hoodwinked into purchasing something that's really not going to accomplish our goals. There is an organization that certifies veterinary products for oral health. I don't have the name of it right off hand. I think it's VOHC or something along those lines. You can look at the products and see that they are actually certified by veterinary dentists. There's actually an association of veterinary dentists, yes, it's the Veterinary Oral Health Council, VOHC, that will look at products and do product reviews. If you're looking for a product and you're not really sure if you should spend the money on it, then look for the VOHC certification. If you're looking for somebody that does dentistry, talk to your veterinarian. Most clients aren't aware that their regular veterinary clinic will do dental health care.

They just simply don't know, because we probably haven't done as good a job as veterinarians in educating them about what kind of services we provide. But most veterinarians will anesthetize patients and do dental cleanings. We take dental x-rays here in our practice. Not every practice does, but we have the ability to take dental x-rays and see if there are any teeth that are damaged under the gum line. So we have a better idea, just like you have oral x-rays taken of you, we have a better idea of what's going on under the gum line, other than just what's sticking out, because the crown of the tooth is the part you can see. The root, of course, is underneath. Typically, the root is about the same size as the crown. So that big fang tooth, that canine tooth your dog has, it might be an inch or an inch and a half long, there's that much under the gum line, too. People don't appreciate that.

They don't understand that there can be pathology under there, too, and they just can't see it. But there are veterinary dentists that are actually board certified in dentistry. There are several of them in Wisconsin. There's one in Oshkosh and Milwaukee. There's some in Madison. You have to go to the larger communities. But if you've got really significant dental disease or you need some kind of help with even orthodontic kind of work, we see veterinary dentists doing those kinds of procedures. Dogs can lose a tooth and have a crown put in. Dogs can have an artificial tooth put in. Most people don't do those unless they have a dog that's a high-powered performance dog, maybe a police dog that's doing a lot of bite work, things like that. But those services are available.

If you have a dog that you really feel adamantly, you don't want a tooth to be lost, contact your local veterinarian. Ask for a referral to the veterinary dentist. They will get you in touch with the right people. The vet school has them. And like I said, Oshkosh and Milwaukee have them. They are available. Actually, it's pretty cool that we have veterinary dentists to do that advanced work.

**Nick Rusch:**

Right. Well, on top of that, too, and circling back to what you mentioned earlier, some of the signs to watch out for, for dental health of the dogs, about how they react and what things that they're doing, they can't tell you. They can't tell you, "My bicuspid on the lower right side is aching today."

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Right. Or they go out and eat a mouthful of snow and then it hurts. It's just like ice cream.

**Nick Rusch:**

It hurts. They can't give you that information, so very, very vital to watch out for those signs and know what to do. Doctor, the time with you always seems to go so fast, because we cover a lot of information and because it's interesting. Let's give folks your contact information, so if they have questions about anything that we covered today or anything in general, any veterinary questions, or maybe you're looking for a new veterinary service provider, these are the folks to talk to. Dr. Greer, tell us how to get ahold of you.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Sure. We're located technically outside of Brownsville. Our address is Lomira, but we're at the corner of Highway 41 and 49, across from Quad/Graphics and the automobile sale auction, at the corner of 41 and 49, just right there. It's easy to find this big red building right on the highway. Our phone number is (920) 269-4000. Our website is [smallanimalclinic.com](http://smallanimalclinic.com) or [veterinaryvillage.com](http://veterinaryvillage.com). But if you can't spell veterinary, just go to [smallanimalclinic.com](http://smallanimalclinic.com). It takes you to the same website. We are open seven days a week. We are taking new clients for wellness. Please feel free if you need any kind of veterinary care to give us a call. Our email address is [vv@k9stork.com](mailto:vv@k9stork.com). So give us a holler.

**Nick Rusch:**

Fantastic. Just on a side note too, doctor, thanks very much. Have you seen at all the new, All Creatures Great and Small production on PBS?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

No, and I was going to watch it last Sunday. Every other Sunday it's been a football Sunday, so I've had to wrestle the remote control away from my husband. No, have you seen it? Is it awesome?

**Nick Rusch:**

I have. It's excellent. I saw the complete first series. Have you read James Herriot's books?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Every word, more than once.

**Nick Rusch:**

Aren't they phenomenal? When I read those books and I thought of, because we grew up on the farm with lots of different animals and every, I swear to gosh, every character in those books are people that I grew up with in the neighborhood that I knew. They're just phenomenal. I just had to throw that by you just with the 30 seconds we had left here. Dr. Marty Greer-

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Jim Herriot was a great storyteller.

**Nick Rusch:**

Yep, yep. The books are phenomenal and the TV show is also excellent. Doctor, thanks as always for everything. Veterinary Village in Lomira, Dr. Marty Greer, our Pet Talk Tuesday on The Source.