



## Why is General Anesthesia Required to Clean my Pet's Teeth?

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The current standard of care in human dentistry and veterinary dentistry is to clean teeth with an ultrasonic scaler. In the past few years, tips have been developed that allow us to safely use the ultrasonic scaler UNDER the gum line. This is the best way to remove bacteria and plaque but it requires a lot of water to keep the tip from over heating and IT HURTS. General anesthesia is required to protect your pets airway from the water and keep them still so that we do not injure the very sensitive oral tissues. There are times that hand scalers are also used. Hand scalers are VERY sharp and could easily injure delicate oral tissues if an animal were to move during the procedure. General anesthesia also allows us to inspect and clean the inner surface of the teeth, not just the outer, easily visible surfaces. The depth of the gingival pocket is measured 360 degrees around every tooth. Any area with deeper than normal pocketing should be radiographed. Dental x-rays can not be taken on an awake animal without risk to the animal, radiation exposure for our staff and risk to the equipment.



Veterinary dentistry has been a specialty within veterinary medicine since the early 1990's. There is a veterinary dental specialty organization called the American Veterinary Dental College ([www.avdc.org](http://www.avdc.org)) who set the standards for board certification as well as setting the standards for general practice. They have a position statement AGAINST awake dental cleaning. The fact that they felt this was a serious enough issue to develop a position statement in effect means that any veterinarian who performs awake dental cleaning or allows them to be performed within their hospital is practicing below the current standard of care for our profession.

But the groomer can clean my dog's teeth, what's the difference?



The "cleaning" performed by some groomers consists of brushing the teeth with a soft bristled brush. It is NOT a dental scaling. Dental scalers are considered surgical instruments by the PA Veterinary Medical Board. As surgical instruments, they can only be used by or under the supervision of a veterinarian. Use of a hand scaler outside of a veterinary facility by anyone other than the pet owner or a veterinarian is

considered practicing veterinary medicine without a license. Current research shows that it takes 3 to 5 days for plaque to adhere to your pet's teeth. Having the groomer brush once every 4 to 6 weeks without home dental care in between, likely has very little impact on your pet's teeth or the overall health of your pet's mouth. The one clear benefit is that it may alert you to more serious problems if their brushing causes pain or bleeding in which case we hope they would recommend you see your veterinarian.