A study by the American Veterinary Dental Society showed that 80% of dogs and 70% of cats had developed periodontal disease by 3 years of age, making dental disease the most prevalent disease in companion animals.1 Multiple studies have found an association between periodontal disease and pathologic changes in internal organs and other measures of systemic inflammation.2-6 Oral infection, oral trauma, or malocclusions can cause pain and loss of function. Common dental abnormalities in dogs include fractured teeth with or without pulp exposure, persistent deciduous teeth, impacted teeth that appear to be missing, and malocclusions with teeth causing trauma to opposing teeth or soft tissue. Common dental lesions in cats include tooth resorption and mucogingival stomatitis.

Dental disease can often initially be evaluated in an awake patient; however, because much of the tooth structure is not visible on visual examination, a complete assessment is only possible through a comprehensive oral examination (with intraoral radiographs) in an anesthetized patient. Only then can a final treatment plan be made; thus, clients should be advised of potential treatment at the initial examination and must be present or available by phone at the time of examination to finalize the treatment plan and cost estimate.

The primary care veterinarian may perform dental therapy if he or she has appropriate training and proper equipment, or the patient may be referred to a veterinary dental specialist for advanced therapies.

Periodontal disease results from the formation of biofilm (ie, a complex accumulation and organization of microbes) at the gingival margins.