



*Kathy Lewis*

# *Dexter's Day at the Dentist*

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When a dog or cat visits the dentist there are a lot of similarities to our visits to the dentist. They have a thorough exam of their teeth and gums. They also get their teeth cleaned and polished. X-rays are taken to detect any problems below the gum line. If extractions are needed they are done with appropriate medication for pain control. After extractions follow up x-rays are done to be sure all roots are removed. Of course, some things are different. Pets receive anesthesia during dental procedures. Anesthesia allows them to sleep through the procedures and gives us full access to their mouth. This means there are some additional important steps to a pet's dental visit. Dexter and his family have graciously allowed us to photograph his recent visit to show you a typical dental visit at the veterinary hospital.

The first step in Dexter's visit is a complete physical exam by the veterinarian who will be performing the procedures. Because he is going under general anesthesia it is important to listen to Dexter's heart and lungs, check his temperature and check him all over for any signs of illness. Dexter also has a blood screen done to evaluate liver, kidney function and blood counts as well as other parameters that could signal illness. Dexter gets a clean bill of health and is cleared for his dental care.

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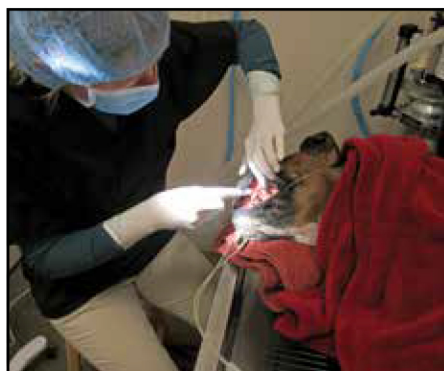
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Dexter is given a sedative to relax him before the procedure. Once he is sedated the veterinary technicians place an intravenous catheter in his front leg. This allows us to give him the anesthetic, intravenous fluids during the procedure and any other medicine he needs while under anesthesia. Once he is fully anesthetized the veterinarian places a tube in his airway. This allows us to keep him asleep with a combination of anesthetic gas and oxygen. While under anesthesia Dexter is constantly monitored by a veterinary technician. The technician monitors heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature and other parameters with the help of special monitoring equipment. These values are recorded and communicated to the veterinarian throughout the procedure.



If extractions will be performed the veterinarian administers medication similar to novocaine to ensure the procedures are as painless as possible during and after the visit. These injections, or nerve blocks, also allow us to use less anesthetic during the procedure. This photo shows the doctor administering a nerve block to Dexter.



Once Dexter is anesthetized a complete exam of the oral cavity is performed by the doctor. Each tooth and the gums

are examined thoroughly. The oral cavity is checked for growths or any other abnormalities. The gums are probed with dental instruments to evaluate the health of the gums and teeth. Loose teeth, broken teeth, gum infections and growths in the mouth are among the many problems that may be found. Cavities are rare in dogs and cats. After the exam the teeth are cleaned and polished in the same way it is done for people. Because Dexter is sleeping with a relaxed jaw the doctor can reach all 4 sides of all the teeth. In this photograph the doctor is polishing the teeth with an ultrasonic polisher.



After the teeth are cleaned and polished we take x-rays of Dexter's teeth. Infections, fractured teeth, resorbing teeth, bone loss and unerupted teeth are among the many problems that are revealed by dental x-rays. This x-ray of Dexter's premolar shows a significant problem. The blue arrow shows where



the bone that holds the tooth in place should be. The green arrow shows where there actually is bone. This tooth is loose, unhealthy and likely painful to Dexter so it needs to be removed. The doctor removes the molar with dental instru-



ments and a drill. The second x-ray of the area is done to be sure the entire root has been removed. Retained roots can cause infection and continued pain.

Dexter sleeps through 8 extractions. The doctor x-rays each site to be sure the roots are gone and then sutures them up with dissolving sutures. Dexter is given several injections to prevent post surgical pain once the nerve blocks wear off. In this case, she also gives antibiotics because there are some infected areas in the mouth. As this photograph shows, Dexter now has clean polished teeth and we are ready to wake him up.



Dexter wakes up quickly and shows no evidence of pain from his extractions. He is sent home with medication to control pain for the next few days. His owners are advised to give him soft food and to come back in a week to check the incision sites. Because his diseased teeth have been removed he should be a happier healthier dog. 🐾

