Should I “risk” a dental in my old dog/cat?

As our beloved canine and feline companions age, their dental health becomes increasingly important. Just like humans, pets can experience dental issues that may impact their overall well-being. While we all agree regular dental care is beneficial for maintaining their oral health and preventing potential complications, many owners are concerned about perceived risks of treatment and prevention, especially in older animals. Here we will lay out the benefits and risks, which will hopefully make your decision making easier.

Benefits of Dental Care:

1. **Prevention of Dental Disease:** Regular dental care, including brushing and professional cleanings, helps prevent common dental issues such as periodontal disease, gingivitis, and tooth decay. These conditions can cause pain and discomfort, affecting the quality of life for older pets.
2. **Improved Overall Health:** Good oral hygiene is linked to better overall health in pets. Dental disease has been associated with systemic health issues, including heart and kidney problems. By maintaining good oral health, we can contribute to improved general well-being.
3. **Pain Management:** Dental disease is painful for animals, and older pets may be more prone to dental discomfort. Regular dental care can help identify and address problems early on, preventing unnecessary pain and discomfort.
4. **Enhanced Quality of Life:** Maintaining good oral health enables pets to eat comfortably and enjoy their food, contributing to a higher quality of life. Dental disease can affect appetite and ability to eat, leading to weight loss and nutritional deficiencies.

Risks of Dental Care:

5. **Anesthesia Risks:** Dental procedures for pets require anesthesia, which can pose risks, especially in older animals. Advancements in veterinary anesthesia and monitoring techniques have significantly reduced these risks, and prior to any dental procedure, we assess the pet's overall health and will often recommend blood screening to minimize

anesthesia-related concerns. While we cannot make this risk zero, we can do a lot to reduce it.

6. **Undiagnosed Underlying Health Issues:** During a dental examination or procedure, veterinarians may discover underlying health issues, such as kidney or heart disease. While this can be beneficial for overall health management, it can also complicate dental procedures and require additional precautions.
7. **Financial Considerations:** Dental care for pets, especially procedures requiring anesthesia and extractions, can be costly. Maintaiing dental health is more cost effective than treating disease, but unfortunately even when everything is done “right” dental disease can occur and sometimes extractions are unavoidable.
8. **Stress for Older Pets:** Older animals may experience stress during veterinary visits and dental procedures. This stress can exacerbate existing health conditions. Veterinarians may take steps to minimize stress, such as providing a calm environment and using sedation or anti-anxiety medications when necessary.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, dental care plays a crucial role in maintaining the health and well-being of older dogs and cats. The benefits of preventing and addressing dental issues far outweigh the potential risks associated with dental care. We aim to develop a dental care plan tailored to the specific needs and health status of all our patients and provide incentives for regular dental checks and where applicable cleaning under anesthetic. Regular at-home care, professional cleanings, and vigilant monitoring can contribute to a longer, healthier life for our beloved senior pets.

Good Health and Happy Holidays

Dr Tony