



Gingival Enlargement – Gingival Hyperplasia

What is Gingival Enlargement?

Gingival enlargement, also called gingival hyperplasia, is thickening or overgrowth of the gum tissues that surround the tooth. This may look like a gingival mass in one area, or it can be generalized and look like knobby gingival growths around each tooth. Gingival hyperplasia specifically means that there is excessive production of the tissues that normally surround the tooth. This excessive tissue can become problematic for your pet.



These upper 3rd & 4th premolars have knobby excess gum tissue covering them, forming pseudopockets that trap fur and plaque next to the tooth.

What causes Gingival Enlargement?

There are several reasons why your pet may have developed gingival enlargement. One of the most common reasons is a breed-related predisposition to this condition. Breeds that are commonly affected include brachycephalic (short muzzle) dog breeds like Boxers, Bulldogs, Pitbull terriers, Boston terriers, and French bulldogs. In other dogs, it can be related to periodontal disease, with the plaque bacteria inducing the formation of overgrown gingiva. Another common reason is certain medications, including certain heart medications, anticonvulsants, and medications commonly used for allergic skin disease. When we first evaluate your pet, we will try to determine the main cause for their gingival enlargement, so please have a list of any current medications that your pet is receiving.

This dog was receiving a medication to control an immune-mediated disorder, which resulted in severe hyperplasia or enlargement of the gum tissues.



Why is gingival enlargement a problem?

The main problem with gingival enlargement is that it creates a pocket next to the tooth in which plaque bacteria, food and hair can become trapped. This can result in rapidly progressive periodontal disease that can cause inflammation and tooth loss. In addition to the periodontal disease that can develop in these “pseudopockets” the excess gum tissue can also become a source of pain and bleeding if it becomes big enough to be traumatized during normal chewing activities. Both of these problems can be averted by properly treating gingival enlargement.

How do you treat gingival enlargement?

The first step in treatment is to identify any predisposing factors for the disease that could be eliminated. If medication is the cause, we may decrease the dose or switch to a different medication if possible. For certain medications, this may not be possible. In cases where plaque bacteria is the inciting reason for the gingival overgrowth, professional treatment and daily plaque control is key (see our handout on *Home care* for ideas on this topic). However, where there is no distinct underlying cause for the gingival enlargement, and when the enlargement is causing a clinical problem, the best way to treat it is to remove the excessive gum tissue. This is called Gingivectomy or Gingivoplasty. This is a surgery aimed at reducing the pockets trapping food next to the tooth and creating a normal contour of the gum tissues. In cases where we cannot identify an underlying reason for the gingival enlargement, it may recur and we may need to repeat the procedure at points during your pet’s life in order to keep the disease under control.



Gingival enlargement can occur in cats as well, as seen in these photos. It can be treated in the same way, by removing the overgrowth and contouring the gingiva back to normal (photo on the right).