

# Bad teeth revealed as biggest problem for pet greyhounds

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Credit: University of Bristol

Dental disease is the most common health issue facing pet greyhounds, according to the largest ever study of greyhounds treated in first opinion veterinary clinics. The research, led by the Royal Veterinary College's (RVC) VetCompass™ programme in collaboration with the University of Bristol Vet School, reveals that 39 percent of greyhounds suffer from dental problems, which is a far higher percentage than for any other dog

breed.

As well as bad teeth, the RVC research revealed that traumatic injuries, overgrown nails and osteoarthritis are also major concerns for pet greyhounds. Overgrown nails affected 11.1 percent of greyhounds, wounds 6.2 percent, osteoarthritis 4.6 percent and claw injury 4.2 percent.

Greyhounds in the UK are typically used for racing during their early lives, with an increasing number rehomed as pets after their racing careers are over. The results of this study, which is published in *Canine Genetics and Epidemiology*, adds significantly to evidence available for the debate on the welfare issues surrounding greyhound racing. It will also help breeders and regulators to prioritise activities to mitigate the worst of the harm to greyhounds from their racing careers, as well as help greyhound rehoming organisations advise adopters on optimal preventative care options.

Researchers studied 5,419 greyhounds seen by first opinion vets in 2016. Key findings include:

- The most common disease in greyhounds was dental disease (39.0 percent affected). This is much higher than VetCompass has reported for other larger breeds such as the German Shepherd Dog (4.1 percent) or the Rottweiler (3.1 percent).
- Urinary incontinence was more common in female greyhounds (3.4 percent) than males (0.4 percent)
- Aggression was more commonly reported in males (2.6 percent) than females (one percent)
- The median lifespan for greyhounds is 11.4 years, compared to the 12 years previously reported for dogs overall
- The most common causes of death in greyhounds are cancer (21.5 percent), collapse (14.3 percent) and arthritis (7.8 percent).



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Dr. Dan O'Neill, Veterinary Epidemiologist and VetCompass™ researcher at the RVC, who was the main author of the paper, said: "Pet greyhounds are now a common breed treated in general veterinary practices in the UK. Retired racing greyhounds can make very good pets, but these results sadly show that they also carry health legacies from inherent breed predispositions as well as impacts from their prior racing careers. These potential problems include bad teeth, behavioural issues and arthritis. Our new VetCompass evidence especially reveals a worryingly high level of [dental disease](#). This awareness should encourage all those who care for the greyhound to prioritise preventive and remedial strategies for these issues and therefore to improve the welfare of this lovely breed, both before and after rehoming as pets."

Dr. Nicola Rooney, co-author and lead researcher on Greyhound Welfare Project at the Bristol Veterinary School, added: "Greyhounds can make fantastic pets and live long healthy lives, but it has long been suspected that they are particularly prone to [dental problems](#) which can negatively impact upon their quality of life. Here we have the first evidence that levels of dental issues are higher in greyhounds than in

other breeds. This highlights the importance of conducting research into ways of improving dental health."

Professor Steve Dean, Chairman of the Kennel Club Charitable Trust (KCCT), explained: "I must declare an interest in this study as my additional role as Chairman of the Greyhound Trust reveals my enthusiasm for this lovely breed. It will come as no surprise to those who love greyhounds that dental plaque is a significant condition in this breed. This latest study from the VetCompass initiative reveals the extent of the problem and should stimulate interest in further work to understand why periodontal disease is such an issue for both the racing dog and the retired [greyhound](#). Effective research could also have a far reaching impact for several other breeds that suffer a similar challenge. The VetCompass programme has been helpful in revealing [breed](#) specific problems and this study is yet another informative analysis of extensive clinical data. The Kennel Club Charitable Trust regards the financial support it provides as a successful investment in clinical research."

**More information:** Dan G. O'Neill et al. Greyhounds under general veterinary care in the UK during 2016: demography and common disorders, *Canine Genetics and Epidemiology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1186/s40575-019-0072-5](#)

Provided by University of Bristol

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