



Puppies can have dental problems.

Part of a puppy's examination will include a dental check. There is a lot going on in their first few months. They get two sets of teeth in 6 months!

Puppy Dental Care

Do puppies have teeth? Oh boy do they have teeth!

They are used to chew shoes and to nip their siblings (and your hands!) during play. Importantly however, of course, they are there to enable the growing dog to eat as it develops from puppy to juvenile dog. Being only puppies, their young mouths are too small to fit in big adult teeth that could be used throughout lives. They need something different for the short period they are pups.

The first set of teeth that a dog gets are called deciduous teeth, or commonly, milk or baby teeth. They are small copies of the adult teeth and perform the same roles. A puppy is generally not born with any teeth present in the mouth, however usually by 3 weeks of age the deciduous teeth start to erupt and are usually all present by 8 weeks of age. The domestic dog usually has 28 deciduous teeth, made up of incisors, canines and premolars. By the time most pups are weaning from their mother, they have enough teeth to start eating a solid puppy diet. They of course are not yet up to catching and eating their own food (!) but the foods we provide are easily broken up by these small deciduous teeth.

As the pup ages, the growing body can fit, and needs, larger teeth than the deciduous set. At around 3 months of age the systematic shedding of these teeth starts, all being slowly replaced by the adult teeth. This loss of the deciduous teeth is completed by around 6 months of age. This permanent set of teeth is larger and adapted to the needs of the adult dog. There are more adult teeth than deciduous, with 42 teeth present in the average dog, all performing different roles.

Puppy teeth problems

Generally, there are not a lot of problems that occur to the baby teeth. They aren't without issues, however. Thankfully their short existence means that there's not a lot of chance for something to go wrong with them.

The most common problem we see with puppy teeth is that sometimes they do not fall out. This is called retained deciduous teeth. Puppy teeth being deciduous should fall out and be replaced by the permanent teeth. Sometimes the roots of the baby teeth do not disappear, and instead of the deciduous tooth being replaced by the permanent tooth, the two teeth are crowded together trying to fit in the mouth in the same position. This results in two problems:

- The deciduous tooth is in the correct position; so, the adult tooth can become maloccluded
- The two teeth are so close together they are at higher risk of developing periodontal disease through life.



Puppies get NEW teeth!

Be on the lookout for your pup getting their new permanent teeth. Sometimes they don't lose their baby ones.

This is more common in the canine teeth and occurs more in smaller breeds of dogs. If you notice that this is occurring with your dog, have them visit their vet. We diagnose retained deciduous teeth if we see the new adult tooth just erupting through the gum (not fully erupted) and the deciduous tooth is firm to touch (not about to fall out). These retained teeth should be extracted completely (with the root) as soon as they are noticed. Leaving them for too long to “give them time to fall out” unfortunately in most cases causes the adult tooth to become fixed in the incorrect position. It is not an uncommon scenario for these retained teeth to be removed at desexing which often is done around 6 months of age, just at the time when the deciduous teeth should have fallen out.

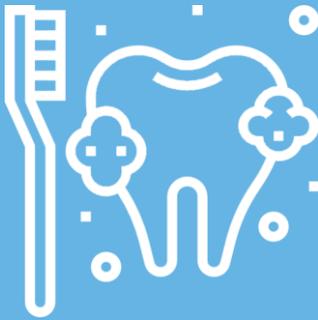
A not uncommon problem seen in puppies is broken teeth. As with adult dogs, puppies that do break their teeth do not always clearly tell us that there is a problem. The broken tooth is a problem, even if the pup is not indicating any outward signs. A broken tooth, in adults also, always goes on to develop an abscess at the tooth root. The infection that develops is a problem because at the root tip, where the infection goes, is a developing adult tooth. This developing tooth can be damaged by the infection and inflammation that occurs. So, in conjunction with the pain that it also causes, these fractured teeth should be removed when they are noticed.

Jaw problems

With much more crossbreeding happening these days, we have seen a rise in jaw problems in dogs. This will often become apparent in the puppy. The top (maxilla) and the bottom (mandible) jaws are under control from two different sets of genes, so when we see breeding between different head shaped dogs we sometimes see the two jaws at different positions.

The most common problem we see in jaw development is an undershot jaw. This is also called prognathism or a Class 3 Malocclusion. This is where the mandibles are relatively too long for the maxilla. A classic breed to suffer from this problem is the Boxer or a Shih Tzu. This malocclusion causes the teeth to not line up properly. As they are designed to damage tissue, any tissue, they do! In dogs with an undershot jaw it is not uncommon for the upper incisors (the front teeth) to touch or dig into the bottom jaw, behind the lower incisors. Although this is arguably cute, the teeth over time can cause a great deal of discomfort and even end up damaging the bone and teeth of the lower jaw.

The opposite problem which we are seeing more and more of is an overbite. Also, called brachygnathism or a Class 2 Malocclusion. This is where the top jaw is relatively too long for the mandibles. This can result in a much bigger problem for those dogs affected. Even as puppies the lower deciduous canines can be in such a position that they strike the roof of the mouth. Anyone who has played with puppies knows that these are sharp and painful teeth. Every time these puppies close their mouths it hurts. This also will occur with the following adult canine teeth too. However, they are much larger and can cause much more of a problem with the dog's mouth.



Puppies need dental care too!

Starting your puppy on a homecare plan whilst they are young and eager to learn is the best time, setting them up for good dental hygiene for life.

In puppies with an overbite, it may be necessary to remove the lower deciduous canines early (12 weeks of age) to stop them being in pain until those teeth fall out. If the adult teeth are in a similar position (which they are normally are) then they can cause fistulae (holes) to form in the roof of the mouth. These teeth should be examined by a Vet and plans put in place to resolve the problem.

By picking up jaw problems early in life, we can sometimes be able to help these puppies avoid some very painful conditions.

Dental Care

From an early age, we want to start teaching our puppies good habits. We also as owners need to develop good habits!

The very best thing we can do to maintain good dental health in our dogs is to brush their teeth. This needn't be a difficult job, or an upsetting fight that happens every evening (yes you should brush once a day!). If we institute a routine and get the puppy used to having its teeth brushed daily from a young age, everyone involved gets used to the idea quickly. Start with getting the pup used to having your fingers poke around in its mouth, up and under the lips and cheeks. After a few days of this, move onto a finger toothbrush. These should be available at your vet, along with some Pet safe toothpaste. Apart from tablets, everything we put in a pup's mouth is swallowed, so adult human toothpaste, which must be spat out, is not healthy for dogs. Once the pup is used to daily brushing with a finger toothbrush, add some of the pet friendly toothpaste and continue! The biggest tip for those wanting to keep their pets mouth as healthy as possible – Don't open their mouth. I even recommend gently holding the mouth closed whilst your finger (with a toothbrush on it) gently in a back and forth motion cleans the teeth under the lips and cheek.