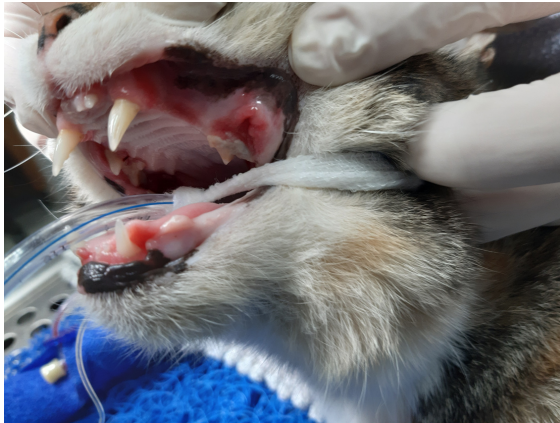


Feline dental disease

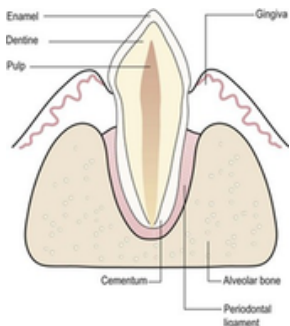


When checking your cat's mouth, your vet or nurse has noticed some abnormalities of your cat's teeth, gums or the soft tissue within the oral cavity which indicates that dental disease is present and needs treating.

Oral and dental disease is painful and very hard to spot in cats as they are fantastic at hiding pain. Dental disease affects between 70% and 90% of cats and, if left untreated, can lead to a range of health problems not only in the mouth, but in the rest of the body.

It's not just about the bad breath.

Anatomy of a tooth.



Enamel is a very hard smooth surface covering the visible crowns of teeth and is contiguous with the cementum that covers the roots of teeth below the gum line. The teeth are held in the sockets by a strong periodontal ligament, and at the neck of the tooth (at the gum line) by strong adherence of the gum (gingiva) to the tooth.

Dental disease is generally caused by a build-up of plaque that grows continuously on the surface of the teeth. Plaque is a thin layer of slimy mucus and bacteria, which if not removed regularly will harden to form a hard layer called calculus or tartar which then causes inflammation of the gum called gingivitis.

There are many different types of feline dental/oral disease.

There are three main types of dental and oral diseases recognised in cats, and several other conditions which are less common.

1. Periodontitis – the end result of untreated gingivitis; infection and inflammation damage the tissues holding the teeth in the sockets.
2. Feline Chronic Gingivostomatitis (FCGS) – a complex, multifactorial disease with severe, painful inflammation of the mouth.
3. Tooth Resorption – another complex, poorly understood disease involving breakdown of tooth structure.

Other dental and oral conditions include tooth fracture, jaw fracture, osteomyelitis (infection of the jaw bone, usually secondary to periodontitis or a long standing untreated fractured tooth), eosinophilic granuloma complex and various cancers of the soft or hard tissues of the mouth.

Fractured upper right canine tooth.

As the tooth is otherwise healthy, a referral for a root canal filling would be the best option. If finances or circumstances do not allow for this, extraction is recommended.



Osteomyelitis secondary to an untreated fractured canine tooth. A large firm mass is present over the canine tooth causing a bulge to the side of the nose. A cancer was suspected, but fortunately after tooth removal and a biopsy, deep bone infection was found to be the cause.

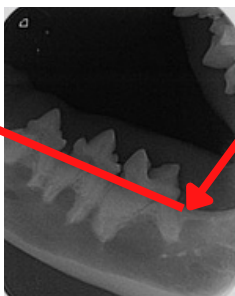


A severely infected canine socket. Poor extraction technique performed by a previous vet resulted in food impaction in an open socket and severe infection. Corrective surgery solved the problem.



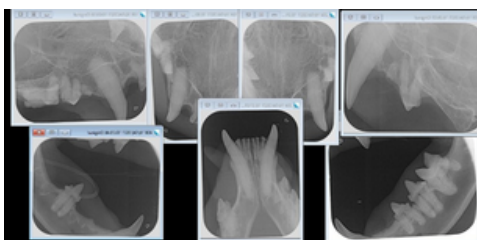
Dentals must be done under a general anaesthetic.

Dental procedures in cats should always include full mouth X-rays (**Vet2Cat always does this**) for thorough analysis of all the teeth, as a lot of the tooth is below the gum line and not visible without X-rays.



You can see underneath the red line just how much of the tooth is below the gum line. Dental X-rays are essential to determine what can stay in and what must come out.

Full mouth series
All the teeth are X-rayed to assess the need for intervention.



Open wide!



There are several steps involved in a thorough dental examination and treatment and unfortunately, our patients won't lay back and say Aaah!!

1. Charting – the current condition of the teeth and gums is visually and manually assessed and noted down, including degrees of calculus and gingivitis, mobility, fractures, pockets around the gums, missing teeth, and any other anomalies.
2. Descale and polish – removing the calculus and plaque with an ultrasonic de-scaler, this may reveal further lesions hidden by the calculus. Polishing is usually done at the end to restore a smooth shiny surface to the enamel.
3. Radiographs – this is absolutely essential in feline dentistry, just as it is in human dentistry. Assessing the tooth roots could mean the difference between a minimally invasive 'crown amputation' procedure or the requirement to cut gum and drill away bone to get the whole tooth out.
4. Extractions as required – depending on the results of steps 1 to 3. Dental nerve blocks are given to provide full pain relief, just like your dentist would do for you.
5. Surgical closure of any areas of gum that had to be cut open – this is really fiddly work in the confines of a cat's mouth, using suture that is barely visible!



Oral care at home



What can I do to keep my cat's teeth healthy?

·**Brushing** - The most effective way to prevent dental disease is to brush your cat's teeth. Ideally, you get your cat used to this when he/ she's still a kitten, but even older cats can learn to accept having their teeth brushed; it takes time and patience however, and ideally should be performed daily. Ask Vet2Cat for advice on starting. It could be the best thing you do for your cat's dental care, avoiding costly dental procedures. Here is a link to a set of instructional videos on Youtube:



·**Dental foods/treats** - The effectiveness of these can vary widely depending on how your cat eats. Sometimes even the large dental kibble can be swallowed whole instead of being chewed, providing no dental care. Many dental treats have little to no benefit but can be extremely calorific! We recommend Royal Canin Dental or Hills TD kibble.

·**Water additives and feed supplements** - There are several additives to go in drinking water or food available on the market. Once again, be cautious of what you buy, as many such products have not been fully evaluated. We currently recommend 'Plaqtiv+', a water additive, and 'Plaque-Off' powder that can be mixed into wet food. Our recommendations may change as new products become available.



As we have said before, cats are brilliant at hiding pain. This is an instinctive defence mechanism that domestic cats have inherited from their wild ancestors. Cats don't cry out in pain unless they are acutely injured or seriously ill.



However....

If you see any of these signs, it's worth calling to arrange a dental check-up to see if a dental procedure is needed:-

- Difficulty eating - Observe your cat while they eat. Does your cat turn their head to the side, drop food out of the side of the mouth, or seem to chew very slowly and cautiously? Sometimes they will avoid chewing at all, so appear to 'gulp' or bolt their food down quickly. Some cats with oral pain (but not all!) will eat less food, whether dry or wet food, which may lead to weight loss. Some cats with oral pain may stop eating when their owners and other pets are present. This may be because they do not want others to observe their signs of pain.

- Behaviour changes - Any change in behaviour can be an indication of pain in a cat. Perhaps your cat no longer wants to sleep with you at night. They can become grumpier and less tolerant of humans and other pets. They may be the opposite and become more clingy. Maybe they have stopped climbing on the cat tower or playing with a favourite toy. If you notice any odd changes in behaviour, it's worth talking to us about it. It could be due to any cause of pain they are feeling.

- Bleeding and other oral signs - Many cats with dental disease will be unwilling to let you look in their mouth due to pain. However, if you can look in your cat's mouth, you may notice redness along the gum line, or a build-up of creamy-brown deposits on the teeth. The breath may be smelly, or you may notice that your cat drools excessively, even when he or she has not been eating.



"Myth Busting!"

"My cat is still eating; they can't be in pain" - I'm afraid that's not true. Cats can be in substantial pain and still eat. The other option is to starve!

"My cat's teeth look clean to me, surely he doesn't need a dental" - It can be difficult to see all of your cat's teeth yourself and signs of dental disease can be very subtle. Rest assured; we would never recommend a dental if we didn't feel it was necessary.

"My cat has already had a dental, they don't need another one" - Unfortunately, it's not necessarily a case of 'one dental per cat-life'. Even with the best oral home care, some dental conditions will affect remaining teeth, such as tooth resorption, and if plaque is not removed regularly, calculus and gingivitis will develop.

"I brush my cat's teeth and use all of the recommended products, my cat doesn't need a dental" - Sadly dental disease can be caused by genetics and the anatomy of your cat's mouth so even if you do all the right things, a dental procedure may still be necessary.

"My cat is old, it's too risky" - this one has an element of truth. However, the risk of the anaesthetic is always weighed up against the benefit of making sure that your cat is pain free for the remainder of their life. We take every precaution to make sure the anaesthetic is as safe as possible. We offer a pre-anaesthetic blood test to make sure their organs can cope with the anaesthesia; they are given intravenous fluids and they are monitored by a qualified veterinary nurse from start to finish.



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