

## Problems with Baby Teeth

Puppies and kittens both have deciduous teeth, or baby teeth, that erupt by the time they are 3-4 weeks old. Sometimes called needle teeth, these primary teeth are often sharp with delicate tips and roots. Although most puppies and kittens do not have any problems, occasionally baby teeth can be a cause for concern. Here are some of the most common problems associated with these teeth.

### Persistent Deciduous Teeth

The number one problem associated with baby teeth in veterinary medicine is when baby teeth fail to fall out! This can happen if the baby tooth is traumatized and dies, but most of the time this is related to genetics, with small and toy breed dogs being predisposed to multiple persistent, or retained deciduous teeth. These teeth fail to undergo normal resorption that allows the tooth to fall out. If a baby tooth is still in place when an adult tooth erupts, it can cause a malocclusion of the adult tooth, preventing it from erupting in a normal position. This can cause serious long-term consequences, including trauma to other teeth and soft tissues, leading to chronic pain and inflammation if not addressed. It will also allow periodontal disease to rapidly develop where the baby tooth and adult tooth are crowded next to each, and can result in the adult tooth being lost due to periodontitis. If a baby tooth and adult tooth are present at the same time, this is Not Normal, and the baby tooth should be removed as soon as possible to avoid any complications.



This Yorkshire terrier dog has 6 persistent deciduous teeth present. The deciduous canine teeth and lower 4<sup>th</sup> premolar are causing the adult teeth to come in at a bad angle. There are several other teeth that are missing as well.



The persistent deciduous canine teeth on this dog's lower jaw are causing the adult teeth to come in too up-right, resulting in trauma to the roof of the mouth.

### Broken and Discolored Baby Teeth

Deciduous teeth are much smaller and more delicate than their adult counterparts- this means that they can break or be traumatized leading to tooth-death relatively easily. This is especially true of the deciduous canine teeth. What should you do if you see that one of the baby teeth are broken, or have turned a pink, purple, or grey color? You should bring your pet to see their veterinarian, and this tooth should be extracted carefully and completely to prevent any further damage to the developing adult tooth. The damage that caused the baby tooth to become discolored or broken may have damaged the developing adult tooth as well. This can be recognized by a defect in the enamel layer of the tooth when the adult tooth erupts. Leaving an untreated broken or discolored baby tooth in the mouth can lead to infection, inflammation, damage to the adult tooth and even failure of the adult tooth to erupt, which can necessitate more invasive surgery to treat.



This 4-month-old dog has a grey, broken deciduous upper canine tooth. The swelling on the gums behind it is where infection from this dead baby tooth is draining into the oral cavity.

### Maloccluded Baby Teeth

If the deciduous teeth are in abnormal position, and are coming into abnormal contact with the other teeth or soft tissues in the oral cavity, they can cause pain and wear. This should be prevented by removing any baby tooth that is causing a malocclusion. This is termed "interceptive orthodontics". If a baby tooth is in an abnormal position, it is likely that the adult tooth will be in a similar malocclusion, and will also need treatment when it erupts between 4 and 6 months of age. For more information on malocclusions, please see our handout on our website.



This 3-month-old dog has a severe under bite, and the baby canine teeth on the bottom jaw are hitting his upper jaw and causing ulcers to form. They should be removed to stop causing pain and trauma. This malocclusion will not correct itself, and when the adult teeth come in, they will also have to be addressed.