



Oral Surgery - Extractions

There are many reasons why a tooth may require extraction. Some of these reasons include fracture of the crown or root, receding gums, severe periodontal disease resulting in loss of bone supporting the tooth, infection of the tooth root or bone surrounding the tooth, sometimes overcrowding of teeth results in more “strategic” teeth being put at risk for developing one of the above conditions. Our goal is to save teeth if possible. However, in certain cases teeth that have lost bone attachment from chronic disease are unlikely to heal and need to be removed. For teeth with more than 50% of supporting bone loss, endodontic disease, crowding or deep caries, extraction is indicated.



This dental x-ray shows the teeth of the upper left jaw in a small dog- These teeth have extensive calculus (which is why they look fuzzy) and extensive bone loss and infection around their roots. These teeth meet several criteria for extraction.

In order to extract a tooth, oral surgery is involved. The roots of dog and cat teeth are long (about 70% of the tooth is under the gumline). In teeth with more than root the roots often bow out from each other. What this means is that extracting a tooth involves much more than just pulling!

When your pet is under anesthesia, we will start by obtaining dental x-rays in order to confirm whether the tooth can be saved or must be extracted. This also gives us key information about the location and shape of the roots of the teeth. Based on this information we can carefully plan our incision and extraction plan.

Once we make the incision through the soft tissues supporting the tooth, we lift these tissues away so that we can see the roots of the tooth, as well as to protect the soft tissues from injury during extraction of the tooth. For the larger teeth especially, a small amount of supporting bone may be removed from the outside surface of the roots to be able to more delicately lift the root out of the bone. After the entire tooth root has been removed, the remaining bone is smoothed, the tooth socket is cleaned of any

inflammatory or infectious debris, and the extraction site is closed over with soft tissues using dissolvable stitches that take between 2-4 weeks to full dissolve.



This dog had 3 premolars removed. The tiny black spots are the stitches that have been placed to close over the extraction sites.

Though the stitches may remain for longer than 2 weeks, the soft tissues heal within 10-14 days. During this time when your pet is healing, it is important to feed only wet food, or dry kibble soaked with water until it is a mushy consistency. It is also important to limit all chew toys and oral playing during this healing process.

We will prescribe pain medications for the first 5-7 days after extractions are performed. Very rarely patients will also require an antibiotic after surgery. We recommend a 2-week recheck examination to make sure everything has healed well prior to returning to their regular diet and oral activities. You will be given complete instructions when your dog is discharged.

Frequently Asked Questions:

How will my pet recover after the have had extractions performed?

Most of our patients can go home the same day after having extractions performed under anesthesia. That night, they will often be sleepy and occasionally whine as their anesthetic medications wear off. They will be sent home with pain medications that should keep them comfortable. Within 2 to 3 days any swelling, pain and inflammation should resolve, and they should be back to their normal activity level, though some patients do feel sleepy on the pain medications that are prescribed. After their 2 week recheck examination when we have cleared them to return to their normal activity and diet, the vast majority of patients are feeling as good (if not better!) than they were before their extractions.

My pet needs to have teeth extracted – how will they eat?

Dogs and cats actually only use their back premolar and molar teeth (the carnassial teeth) to chew. The incisor teeth (the little teeth at the front) can be helpful in scratching itches. The canine teeth (the big fang-like teeth) are great for biting prey. The smaller premolar teeth are used to some extent to gnaw and chew but the large majority of chewing is done by the upper 4th premolar teeth and lower 1st molar teeth. What this means is that if the incisors, canine teeth, or other premolar or molar teeth need

to be extracted you will probably not notice any difference in how your pet chews after these teeth are extracted.

What if one of the carnassial teeth needs to be extracted? The answer to this is that dogs and cats are adaptable. It may take them a little longer to chew kibble than it did before. It may mean that we need to give them smaller kibble, kibble soaked until it is moist, or a wet diet for them to get enough nutrition. Most often teeth are so painful and diseased when they are extracted that after extraction, the relief is so great that your pet will eat the same night after it is removed. Even pets that have full-mouth extractions eat well after their extractions. Remember- they do not need to catch their dinner- we've already caught and cooked it for them!

Why do teeth need to be extracted?

There are multiple reasons why a tooth may need to be extracted. The two most common reasons are *periodontal disease* and *endodontal disease*.

With periodontal disease, there are several criteria we use to determine if a tooth must be extracted. These criteria are if the tooth has more than 1mm of mobility (when you push on the tooth it moves), if there is more than 50% of the supporting bone around the tooth missing due to periodontal inflammation, or if there is no bone between the 2 roots of a tooth. If any of these criteria are present, there is no possibility of returning the tooth to a healthy status where your pet's mouth will be free of inflammation and pain. There may be cases where we can attempt to return a tooth to health, but this often requires several anesthetics and intensive at-home care (including *daily brushing*) in order to maintain tooth health while it heals. You as your pet's care-taker will have to commit to daily brushing and follow-up appointments in order for an advanced periodontal therapy to be successful.

In endodontal disease, the tooth has died either from a fracture or from other trauma to the tooth that has caused irreversible pulpitis. This is inflammation of the pulp, the living part of the tooth, leading to tooth death. In some cases, *root canal treatment* is an excellent alternative to extraction. However, for non-strategic teeth, teeth where the fracture extends under the gumline, and in teeth with severe inflammation affecting the root, extraction is often the best option.