



Tooth Resorption in Cats

Tooth resorption is one of the most common dental problems in cats. Tooth resorption has had many different names in the past such as cervical neck lesions, caries, cavities, and feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions.

What is tooth resorption?



Tooth resorption occurs when the dentin of the tooth begins to resorb and becomes damaged. The resorption starts to spread to deeper tissues and affect the pulp cavity. If this damage continues it can result in the loss of the tooth crown as it is eaten away. X-rays of these teeth will show the roots becoming resorbed and they become difficult to differentiate from the surrounding bone. Intra-oral dental radiographs are an important tool in identifying resorptive lesions in teeth as they allow visualization of deeper structures like the pulp cavity and bone. During this process the gums become inflamed and painful.

It is not known why tooth resorption occurs in the first place. There are no known links to diet or oral hygiene. If it is going to happen, it will happen no matter what we do.

Clinical signs of Tooth Resorption

- Pain in area of absorption
- May start to prefer wet food over dry
- Swallow food whole or drop food
- Chew more on unaffected side, heavier tartar on the affected side
- Chatter when area is touched, may even bleed



Figure: Tooth resorption occurring at the gumline seen as a fleshy red area

Treatment for Tooth Resorption

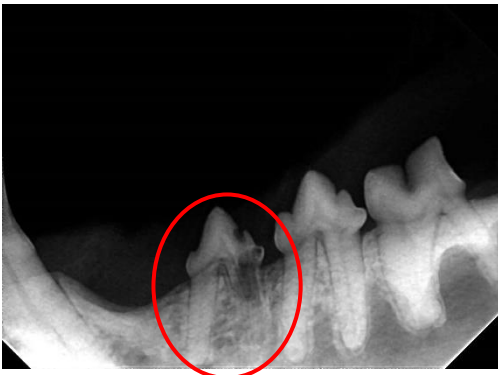


Figure: X-ray of tooth resorption. Notice the lesion at the gumline and the root becoming indistinguishable from the surrounding bone.

The goal we have for our cats is to have a pain-free and functional bite. They are better to have no tooth than to have a tooth that is painful. This resorptive damage is not reversible and cannot be repaired. Attempts for repair have been tried but none to date have been successful. Extraction or crown amputation is the only known treatment at this time.

A cat may only ever have a single tooth affected by resorption or it may have several that occur over time. It is not possible to predict if a tooth will suffer resorption in the future. Cats will hide their pain well which is why annual oral exams are recommended to assess the health of the mouth.