

Tooth Resorption

Tooth Resorption (TR) is one of the most common and most painful types of dental disease in cats. It is relatively uncommon in dogs, but does occur occasionally.

What causes Tooth Resorption (TR)?

Tooth Resorption is thought to be caused by an abnormality in the odontoclastic cells of the tooth. Normally, these cells break down old tooth at the same rate as new tooth is being developed. However, in a tooth resorption these cells are not kept in check, which leads to a slow destruction of the tooth structure. This process creates holes in the enamel and dentin of the tooth not only weakening it, but exposing the pulp chamber of the tooth to outside invasion. The pulp chamber is a canal that runs through the middle of the tooth that houses the tooth's blood supply and nerves. When there is an exposed nerve, the tooth becomes excruciatingly painful, and an open blood supply invites bacteria to enter the tooth leading to infection.

What can I do to prevent TR from occurring?

No one is sure exactly why TR occurs so we are unsure how to prevent it. Good oral care is thought to aid in prevention, but that has not been proven. TR is a progressive disease. This means that once your pet is diagnosed with TR, more resorption it is likely to be seen again in the future.

Treatment

Unfortunately, at this time the only treatment for TR is extraction.

Signs

There are often no signs until the resorption is in an advanced stage. Some of the abnormalities that may be seen include bleeding gums, reluctance to eat, swelling above or below the gumline, loose teeth and tooth loss.

Diagnosis

Since there frequently are no signs that an animal has TR until the disease is advanced early diagnosis is very important. Sometimes, TR can be seen on physical examination by your veterinarian. However, the majority of TR is not found until dental x-rays are taken.

Monitoring

Routine dental cleanings and oral radiographs need to be performed every 6-12 months (depending on your veterinarian's recommendation) in order to monitor for TR. Regular tooth brushing at home is also a great way to monitor for any changes in your pet's teeth and/or oral discomfort between professional cleanings.

When to call

If any changes are noticed in your pet's mouth, or if they no longer allow you to brush or inspect their teeth, it is a good idea to get them seen by their veterinarian.