

# Tooth and gum disease in cats

## Overview

Tooth and gum disease is common in cats and tends to be very painful. Most cats will continue to eat even if they are in pain so it's important to keep an eye out for early signs of a problem.

If a dental problem is left without treatment it can become much more serious and cause problems such as kidney disease or heart disease.

Our pet cats rely on us to help them look after their teeth. As well as checking your cat at home they should have their mouth checked by your vet at least once a year (usually at their booster vaccination). Tooth brushing, tooth gels and special diets all help to keep their mouth healthy.

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any problems with your cat's mouth.

## Symptoms of dental disease in cats

- Bad breath
- Eating less or difficulty eating (chewing on one side of the mouth)
- Tartar
- Sore gums (red, inflamed or bleeding)
- Wobbly, missing or broken teeth
- Dribbling
- Preferring soft food to biscuits
- Swollen face
- Pawing at the mouth/face

- Weight loss

## Plaque and tartar

Most tooth and gum disease is due to plaque and tartar. Saliva and bacteria form a clear, sticky film over your cat's teeth called plaque. If plaque isn't brushed off at the end of the day it will eventually turn into a hard, brown substance called tartar. Tartar attracts bacteria, causes inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) and eventually causes tooth damage.



Tartar also allows bacteria to enter the blood stream and damage organs such as the kidney, heart and liver.

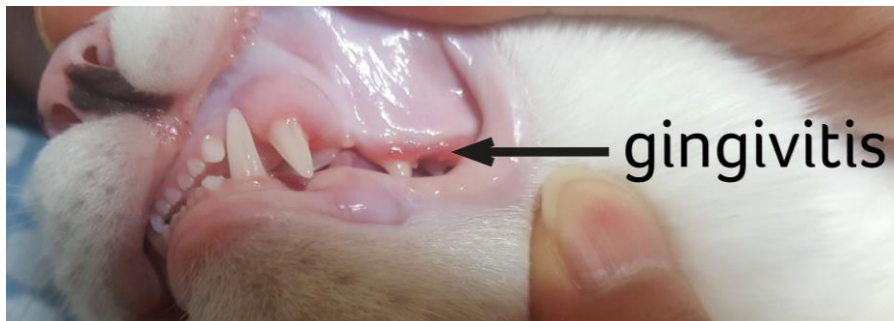


## Gum disease

- **Gingivitis**
- **Periodontitis**
- **Gingivostomatitis**

### Gingivitis

- Gingivitis is inflammation of the gums. Gingivitis in cats can be caused by problems such as:
  - Tartar
  - Cat flu
  - FIV
  - FeLV.
- Gingivitis is painful and can make eating very tricky. In severe cases it starts to affect the tooth sockets and / or the whole mouth (gingivostomatitis).



*Gingivitis: notice the red line above the teeth.*

### Gingivostomatitis

- Gingivostomatitis is a very painful condition that causes severe inflammation in the mouth (much more severe than gingivitis).
- Areas affected include gums, lips, inside of the cheeks, the roof, floor and back of the mouth.
- Gingivostomatitis is often caused by the body overreacting to bacteria in the mouth.

## Tooth disease

### Broken teeth

- Teeth occasionally break or crack if they are weakened by dental disease, if they are knocked by something or if your cat chews on something hard.
- This can be very painful, especially if the inside of the tooth (that contains nerves) is exposed. Once a tooth is damaged, infections are much more likely to develop.
- It may be necessary to have your cat's broken tooth removed.

### Tooth resorption

- Tooth resorption is when sections of tooth are eaten away, it's a condition that affects more than a third of pet cats.
- Lesions are painful and often cause teeth to snap off at the level of the gum. Teeth with resorbed lesions often need removal.

### Tooth root abscesses

- A tooth root abscess is a painful pocket of pus under a tooth (see illustration). You may not notice an abscess itself, only that your cat has a painful mouth.
- Tooth root abscesses are very painful. Your vet may prescribe antibiotics but in many cases, the tooth will need to be removed.

## Causes

### Age

Dental disease is much more likely as your cat gets older due to wear and tear throughout life.

### Diet

Feeding dry biscuits is considered slightly better for your cat's teeth because it physically removes some of the plaque as they chew.

### Breed

Purebred cats such as Persian, Maine Coon, Burmese and Siamese are more likely to suffer from dental disease.

### Retained baby teeth

Young kittens have a set of baby teeth that fall out as their adult teeth start to come through. If these baby teeth don't fall out, they can trap food and bacteria. Your vet might recommend removing baby teeth under anaesthetic if they are causing a problem.



## Treatment

Treatment for dental disease depends on the specific problem, but may include:

### Anti-inflammatory pain relief

- Your vet may prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pain relief to make your cat more comfortable.

### Antibiotics

- Antibiotics are sometimes (but not always) necessary to fight infection.

### Dental surgery

- Unlike a human, a cat won't sit still and open their mouths for examination. The only way to safely clean or remove teeth is under an anaesthetic.

### Cat mouthwash

- Special cat mouthwash can be added to the water your cat drinks. This helps to keep their mouths as clean as possible.
- Never use human mouthwash for your cat.

## Cost

Dental disease can cost several hundred pounds (this can vary a lot depending on the problem). Always speak to your vet if you can't afford the treatment they have recommended, there may be another option.

If you are struggling with veterinary fees, PDSA offers free or reduced cost treatment to eligible clients.

We strongly recommend insuring your pets as soon as you get them so that you are covered for future problems. Always check if your insurance policy covers dental disease.

## Outlook and prevention

The earlier dental disease is noticed, the easier it is to treat. If your cat needs teeth removed, don't be alarmed – cats cope incredibly well with a few or no teeth. Better to have no teeth and no pain than lots of unhealthy, painful teeth.

### Tooth brushing

- We understand tooth brushing can be tricky in pet cats. However, regular tooth brushing is by far the best way to prevent dental disease.
- The aim of brushing is to remove plaque before it turns into solid tartar.
- Speak to your vet or vet nurse if you aren't able to brush your cat's teeth, they will be able to give you tips for keeping your cat's mouth healthy.

### Check ups

- Regular dental checks with your vet will also help to stop serious problems developing.

## When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any of the symptoms above or you think your cat might have a problem with his / her teeth or gums. They will have a good look inside your cat's mouth – which can be difficult to do at home!

**You know your cat best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.**

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