



Tooth Resorption in Cats



Tooth resorption (TR) is a common dental condition that affects over 50% of all cats over three years of age. Previously, teeth affected by resorption have also been

called cervical line erosions, neck lesions, cat cavities, feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions, and external/internal root resorption. A tooth with resorption will gradually break down as it is re-absorbed by the cat's body. As the erosion progresses, the inside of the tooth becomes exposed and unprotected. This condition can be extremely painful.

Disease Progression

Tooth resorption begins as a small erosion in the enamel of the tooth and steadily grows to damage more of the tooth until it breaks away, either partially or completely. Below the gums, the destruction continues as the tooth root is also weakened, and the cat's body may begin to replace it with bone in response to the destruction of healthy structures. Tooth resorption can be seen in five stages, depending on the severity of disease progression:

- **Stage 1:** Initially, the only visible evidence is a small defect in the enamel of the tooth. The resorptive lesion is usually not painful in this stage, because it has not yet progressed into the dentin of the tooth.
- **Stage 2:** The lesion now penetrates both the enamel and the dentin. As this stage, the tooth may be sensitive and/or painful.
- **Stage 3:** Not only are the enamel and dentin layers compromised, but the inner space where nerves and blood vessels are (pulp chamber) is now also affected. The lesion is definitely painful at this stage!
- **Stage 4:** Extensive damage has been done to both the crown and root of the tooth. The enamel, dentin, and pulp chamber are exposed, and the tooth will appear broken.
- **Stage 5:** Where there once was a tooth, now there is only a bump in the gum. Underneath the gum lies the jagged remains of a fractured tooth that the cat's body has tried to cover for protection.



Affected Teeth

Tooth resorption is usually found on the outside of the tooth at the junction where the tooth meets the gum. The premolars of the lower jaw are most commonly affected, but any tooth can be destroyed by tooth resorption. Even having just one tooth with resorption puts a cat at risk of developing more teeth that will be destroyed over time.

Dental Pain Is Real!

Cats with tooth resorption experience severe mouth pain. They may drool, bleed from the mouth, experience jaw tremors, have difficulty chewing food, or stop eating altogether. **The most common clinical sign of tooth resorption, however, is no sign at all!** Cats are hard wired to mask their pain. The domestication of cats has done nothing to suppress their innate instinct to avoid appearing weak by outwardly showing pain. 'Survival of the fittest' takes over and most cats continue on, seemingly unaffected, despite having the nuisance of constant dental pain.

Management

For all cat teeth in any stage of tooth resorption, the only treatment is extraction of the tooth. Despite efforts by veterinary dentists, no alternative method has been found to restore these teeth or stop the progression of resorption. By removing teeth in any stage of resorption, we eliminate the cat's source of severe dental pain, whether current or future.

Cause And Prevention

Veterinarians have explored many theories over the years, but the cause of feline tooth resorption still remains a mystery. We do not know how to prevent it, nor can we predict which teeth or when they will be affected by it. **We do know that cats affected by tooth resorption will continue to develop more lesions as they age, and we know that teeth with resorption beyond stage 1 are painful.** We manage this condition by extracting all affected teeth, and monitoring cats with resorption regularly (twice a year is recommended) for new lesions.

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