

Fractured (broken/chipped) canine (eye) teeth are a common injury in cats. They can occur following falls, by running into objects, clashing teeth during cat fights and as a result of road traffic accidents. In a study it was found that 14% of cats had fractured teeth.

The large majority of these damaged teeth are the canine teeth in the upper jaw as they are uniquely vulnerable to injury due to their position in the cat's mouth.

You may not be aware that your cat has a broken or chipped tooth until your veterinary surgeon or nurse tells you about it after discovering a problem during a routine health check. This is because relatively few people examine their cat's mouth and also that cats have an amazing capacity to conceal pain so we are unaware that they are suffering!

All damage to the canine teeth should be considered significant until proven otherwise. Damage to the tooth tip makes the tooth vulnerable to attack by bacteria and saliva resulting in inflammation within the tooth that is painful. Cats are particularly susceptible as the chamber containing the sensitive structures of the tooth is very close to the tip of the tooth – only 1.5mm away! It is even shorter in young cats (under nine months old), but as cats reach six to seven years the distance then starts to increase.

How will my vet diagnose if there is inflammation?

In humans this is assessed by how sensitive we are to pain, eg: when eating an ice cream, or by the dentist testing whether we can feel pain when a small electrical current is applied to the damaged tooth. This is quite difficult in cats as these methods are not available to us. Even with radiography, no significant changes may be detected and so often we have to assume that cat canine teeth with any injury are in trouble and require treatment.

What treatment options are available?

This will depend on the cat's age, but if the pulp chamber has been exposed then either endodontic treatment or extraction may be required. In general:

1. Cats under nine months of age all injuries can be assumed to cause inflammation and will require appropriate treatment.
2. Cats from nine months to six to seven years old often require treatment.
3. Cats over six to seven years may not require treatment and may only require regular radiographic (x-ray) monitoring .

NB: General anaesthesia, rather than sedation, is usually required for all of these procedures to be performed.

Endodontic (Root Canal) Treatment

This is the treatment of choice for injuries to the cat canine tooth and it is aimed at preventing bacteria entering the pulp chamber and progressively damaging the ligaments and bone around the root of the tooth.

Endodontic treatment allows:

- The cat canine tooth to maintain its function.
- Surgical extraction to be avoided.
- Minimising the risk of damage occurring to the upper lip by the remaining opposing lower canine tooth if an upper jaw canine tooth has to be removed .

The drawbacks of endodontic treatment are:

- It requires referral to a specialist dental clinic.
- It costs significantly more than extraction.
- There is a requirement for ongoing follow up care (x-rays under sedation or general anaesthesia).
- The possibility that the tooth will subsequently suffer from another disease – in cats this would commonly be tooth resorption and then dental surgery may be required.

Surgical Extraction

This is the treatment of choice when:

- Costs are a concern.
- Tooth re-sorption is already occurring.
- The fracture is old and the tooth is damaged by infection beyond the point where endodontic treatment is likely to be successful.

In cats with damaged canine teeth, surgical extraction is required as the tooth is larger below the gum line than it is above (a bit like an iceberg!) and we need to remove part of the bone holding the tooth in place in order to remove the damaged tooth properly.

If you would like to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact us on 01722 333291



Quick Reference Guide
Why dental treatment has been recommended for your pet

Fractured Canine Teeth in Cats



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