

During a puppy or kitten's first visit at 8 weeks, in addition to a physical exam, we perform a complete oral examination and check the teeth. All primary teeth should be in place, and we will check occlusion to make sure that there is no abnormal tooth-to-tooth or tooth to soft tissue contact. Early detection of malocclusions can allow intervention that will alleviate pain and potentially correct the malocclusion through interceptive orthodontics. (See malocclusions)

Permanent teeth will begin eruption at 4 months of age, and continue until 7-8 months of age. During this time we will continue to monitor occlusion and watch for retained primary teeth. (See Retained Primary Teeth) Any retained primary teeth should be extracted, and any teeth still not present at 6 months should be x-rayed to rule out impacted teeth. Teeth that are impacted may cause formation of cysts, which can cause bone destruction.

Developmental or genetic abnormalities can cause malformed teeth, or teeth erupting in abnormal locations. This can be due to a malformation of the skull, or a disorder of tooth eruption. Malformed teeth should be x-rayed, and in some cases extraction is necessary to prevent infection.

Trauma to primary teeth can cause pulp exposure. Pulp exposure leads to infection, and can damage the developing permanent tooth and the surrounding bone. Broken primary teeth should be extracted as soon as detected to prevent further damage. Puppies should be discouraged from rough chewing, tug of war or chewing on hard objects such as bones, cow hooves to avoid tooth damage.

Crowded and rotated teeth are common in brachycephalic breeds (such as Pugs, Lhasa Apsos, Boston Terriers, Boxers) as well as toy breeds. This crowding creates areas where plaque buildup accumulates between teeth and rapidly leads to periodontal disease. By performing early selective extraction of teeth that are crowding more important strategic teeth, long term control of periodontal disease can be much more successful.

Puppies and kittens also present a golden opportunity to begin handling and behavior training that will allow for daily tooth brushing, improving your pet's periodontal health for life. (See Preventive Care)

