

YOUR DOG'S TEETH

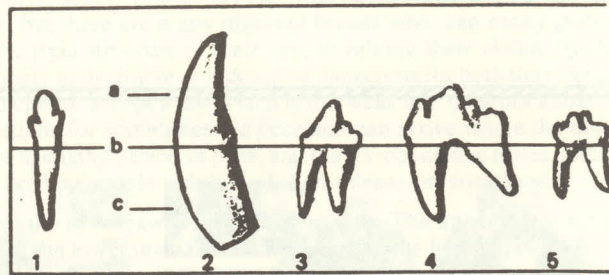
*Translated by Udo Giertolla
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A good knowledge and a steady observation of the teeth by the dogs owner will give him an idea of their health. The dogs teeth are pointy and sharp, and should be white and shiny. The roots are strong and the teeth evenly arranged in a scissor bite.

The dog has 42 teeth, twenty in the upper jaw and twenty-two in the lower jaw. They are known as I = 1-3 Incisors, C = Canine, P = 1-4 Premolars, and M = 1-3 Molars. The P4 is the biggest tooth in the upper jaw. In the lower jaw the biggest tooth is the M1.

The incisors are lily shaped with a three capped crown. The middle part of the tooth is the most important. If this part shows signs of wear and tear it is rated as worn or levelled down. The milk teeth or first teeth wear down soon after their growth. They push each other apart and at 2½ months the incisors in the lower jaw will have almost fallen out. At 3-4 months these incisors will be lost, molars and premolars will then disappear. The canines are the last to fall out. It depends on the size and breed of the dog, as to when they lose their teeth, usually between 2½ and 5 months of age.

1. Incisor
2. Canine
- 3, 4, 5, Pre-Molars and Molars
- a. Crown
- b. Neck
- c. Root



The teeth stay white and intact until around 12 months of age. At 15 months one can observe traces of wear of the lower incisors. Soon after, at approximately 18 months, a levelling down of the lower incisors can be observed.

The lower incisor crowns are well worn at 2½ years and wear of the upper incisor crowns is about to start. The upper incisor crowns are well worn at 3½-4 years, and the upper middle incisors at 4-5 years. Wear on the canines is relatively insignificant. They only wear very slowly and seldom before 6½ years of age.

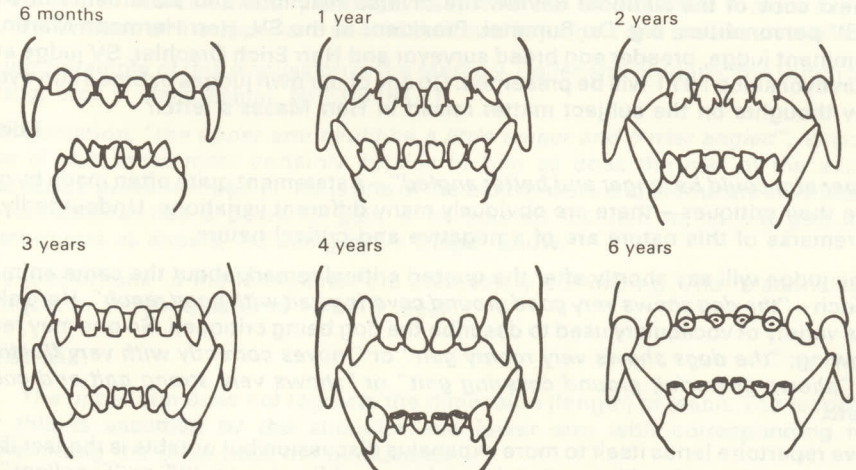
Early and quick abrasion will occur from playing with stones and also by chewing too many bones. The nice white color of the dental enamel will change and become yellowish. An older dogs teeth can look decayed, with opened necks of the teeth, and covered with tartar. Infected gums are also quite common in older dogs. Older dogs can lose their teeth just the same as older people.

What kind of deficiencies and illnesses can occur in dogs teeth? How can we detect them?

Apart from a faulty bite – overshot, undershot and missing teeth, we can most easily detect Distemper teeth. These are teeth with severe damage to their enamel. It can be patchy or affect the whole tooth. The brown colored inner part of the tooth lays exposed. the experts are not yet in agreement over the origin of this problem.

Often seen, but ignored or not recognized by many dog owners, is the build up of tartar. Tartar is not beauty spots, but often the start of a long list of illnesses and finally loss of the dogs teeth. Very disturbing at this stage, is the dogs foul smelling mouth. Tartar can spread over the edge of the gums. The build up of tartar in the pockets is mixed with particles of blood and appears green to dark brown. The rough surface of tartar encourages further growth of bacteria and creates an increasingly thicker layer.

Eventually a nasty infection of the gums will set in, Parodontosis, and the loss of teeth can no longer be prevented. Hence tartar must be taken very seriously and its removal is most essential. A well balanced diet of carbohydrates, calcium and phosphate will help to prevent it. The food should not be too soft and an occasional bone will clean the teeth.



Caries effect dogs relatively seldom, because their teeth are conically shaped and hardly ever touch. If dogs do suffer from caries, it is usually the molars which are affected. Strangely enough dogs suffer this pain with great patience, only rarely favouring the healthy side of the jaw to chew their food. A far more unpleasant situation is caused by infections of the nerves in the teeth. This is called 'Trauma – Concussion of the Roots,' caused by biting into hard objects e.g. bones, stones, wood, too hard protective clothing. The incisors and canines are mostly affected.

These damaged teeth can only be saved by treatment of the root to remove the nerve, but very often these teeth have to be removed. The affected or removed teeth can only be substituted by dentures. It has been tried on occasions. The success rate ranges from great to disastrous. To crown a canine nowadays is technically no problem, but the dog loses much of its strength of bite. Much more difficult, if not impossible, is the fitting of full dentures or bridges.

Overall we can say that every dog owner can do something for his dog's teeth. This can be done by simple, regular inspections. Looking out for tartar, caries, parodontosis, fractures, damage to the enamel, unusual abrasions, discoloration of the teeth and perhaps the position of the teeth. If any of these factors are noticeable we should consult a vet, and they can treat the problem, or at least delay the spreading of these diseases.