

Dental Extractions and the Tooth Fairy

Meet Henry. He is a 7 year old short haired cat who lives in a loving home. His owner notices his stinky breath and takes him to the veterinarian. She is shocked when the veterinarian lifts his lips and exposes thick brown tartar and bleeding gums. She's further disheartened when the vet gently probes the gums and Henry chatters his teeth in pain. The veterinarian teaches Henry's owner about his periodontal disease and recommends a teeth cleaning with extraction of the extremely diseased teeth. The owner agrees to the procedure and Henry receives a thorough dental cleaning and dental x-rays which reveal many of the teeth being "eaten away". The veterinarian diagnoses Henry with feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions (FORLs) which occur when the crown and root of the tooth are literally eaten away causing severe pain and eventually the jaw bones to reabsorb portions of the teeth. Henry then receives local anesthetic blocks and surgical extraction of the affected teeth (11 in total) via high speed electric drill and manual extraction, followed by flushing of the sockets with antiseptic and surgical closure of the gums. Two weeks later, Henry's owner is ecstatic when she reports to the veterinarian that Henry hasn't been this friendly or eaten so well since he was a kitten. She feels awful that she has unknowingly allowed him to suffer in silence all these

years. Unfortunately, Henry's story isn't unique. Many severe dental problems go unnoticed because animals are extraordinary at hiding pain and to be perfectly honest, how many owners actually look in their pets mouths? There are MANY reasons that your veterinarian may recommend your pet have teeth be extracted including some of the following:

1. Retained deciduous or baby teeth. If the baby teeth don't fall out appropriately, they interfere with the adult teeth coming in a correct position and orientation
2. Bacterial infection to the inside of the tooth which may be caused by a fracture, pulp canal exposure from chronic chewing on a hard object or irreversible pulpitis which is inflammation in the inside of the tooth appearing as a pink, grey or purple discoloration. All of these, while painful themselves, can lead to an abscess at the root of the tooth which is incredibly painful.
3. Advanced periodontal disease due to a lack of proper dental hygiene can be visualized as brown tartar accumulation and red irritated gums. This leads to tooth attachment loss and infection.
4. Stomatitis which is severe inflammation of the gums. The true cause of this painful disease is unknown, but essentially the

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body has an excessive response to minimal tartar causing severe gingivitis, painful oral ulcers and ulceration of the palate, tongue, and gums.

5. Oral neoplasia. Many types of oral cancers including malignant melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and fibrosarcoma can occur in the mouth and often appear as a small bit of extra "gum", but can be invasive and deadly.
6. Malocclusion, or misalignment of mouth and teeth, can cause permanent difficulties with chewing.
7. FORLs (discussed above)

A huge misconception is that an animal won't be able to eat or be

happy if they are missing teeth. This couldn't be more incorrect. As demonstrated by Henry, if an animal has a mouth full of diseased teeth and all of them are removed, they will be far more comfortable and happy than they were prior. It is always better to prevent tooth loss by taking your pet to your vet routinely for oral exams and regular dental cleanings, performing at home dental care, and preventing them from chewing on hard objects. But rest assured, if the Tooth Fairy (AKA your trusted veterinarian) visits and your pet loses some teeth, he will be much better off than he was before.

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