



## Retained Baby Teeth

Cats and dogs, like humans, have two sets of teeth. By 6 weeks old, kittens and puppies have a full mouth of baby teeth. These teeth are small and sharp. At 3-4 months of age, these teeth start to fall out as the adult teeth come in. By the time a pet is 6 months old, all baby teeth should have fallen out and been replaced with adult teeth.

### **What is a retained baby tooth?**

When the baby tooth doesn't fall out as the adult tooth comes in, it's called a retained baby tooth (the technical term is retained deciduous tooth). This baby tooth isn't supposed to stay and will cause problems as the adult teeth keep coming in. The most commonly retained baby teeth are the canines.

### **Problems associated with retained baby teeth**

A retained baby tooth takes up space. This causes the adult tooth to come in at a different angle. This can be a minor problem, or it can cause a major shift in teeth. As teeth shift, they can hit other teeth or the roof of the mouth and cause damage. Your pet may need teeth removed or braces to correct the problem.

The adult tooth usually comes up right next to the baby tooth causing crowding. This provides an area for tarter to build up quickly between the two teeth. Heavy tarter leads to diseased teeth that will need to be pulled if left unattended.

Baby teeth are smaller and more fragile than adult teeth and are more likely to break. A broken retained baby tooth is a cause of infection for the neighboring adult tooth. It will be necessary to remove any infected teeth and treat the pet with antibiotics.

### **How to fix retained baby teeth**

Retained baby teeth need to be extracted under anesthesia. The best time is usually when your pet is being spayed or neutered. If your pet is already spayed or neutered, the retained baby teeth still need to be removed. At that time, a full professional dental cleaning will remove any excess tarter that has built up.



This is a retained canine tooth in a cat.



This dog's retained baby tooth has caused dental disease.



This baby tooth (white arrow) has broken and caused an infection (black arrow).