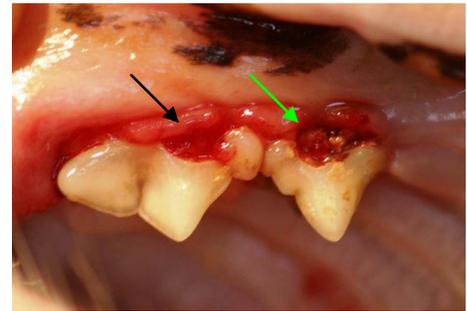




Feline Tooth Resorption Lesions

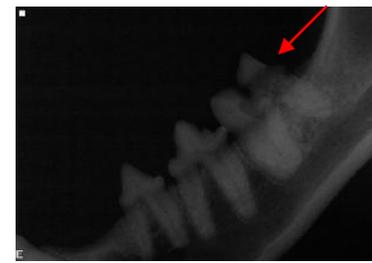
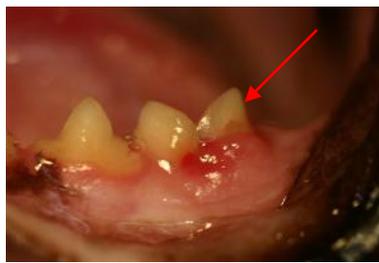
Feline tooth resorption lesions (aka RLs) are one of the most common causes of tooth loss in cats, with as many as 65% of domestic cats affected. The lesions start at, or even below the gum line, and may affect any tooth. If untreated, RLs can lead to further periodontal disease, oral pain, infections and potentially, problems in other areas of the body. Because we don't know what causes tooth resorption, we do not know how to prevent it.

The presentation of RLs is variable. In brief, teeth are composed of enamel on the outside, dentin below it and pulp on the inside. In a stage 1 lesion, a defect in the enamel is seen. Stage 2 lesions affect the enamel and dentin beneath it. In stage 3 lesions, the tooth is affected down to the pulp. Stage 4 RLs the crown of the tooth has been eroded or fractured (→). Resorptive lesions may also occur entirely below the gum line, with damage to the roots of the tooth while the tooth appears normal above the gum line. For this reason, dental x-rays are vital during dental procedures to help identify affected teeth



As cats have more nerve endings in their teeth than people, RLs can be very painful to the cat. Signs may include difficulty chewing (especially dry food), apparent decrease in appetite, halitosis (bad breath), drooling, inflamed gums, oral bleeding, vomiting and/or decreased grooming. The cat may also act painfully when the affected teeth are touched. With stage 4 RLs, the gum tissue may grow over the root fragments (→) leaving a sometimes painful and/or bleeding lesion upon probing.

Early detection is a key factor in treating RLs. Sometimes they are evident during a regular checkup, but often a full intra-oral examination under anesthesia with intra-oral probing is needed. The importance of intra-oral radiographs (x-rays), to confirm exam findings (→), to assess the severity of the lesion (→) and to spot lesions not visible on exam, cannot be stressed enough.



The primary treatment for RLs in cats is extraction of the tooth and any remaining root material. In a small number of cases where the roots are being replaced by bony material, amputation of the crown and the top of the root, leaving the end of the root, may be done. Generally, though, removal of the entire tooth structure upon diagnosis of an RL will help minimize the risks of pain and complications later on. While other treatment modalities have been attempted to try and save teeth with RLs, their long-term effectiveness has not been proven.

In summary, RLs in cats are a common cause of tooth damage that may result in pain and tooth loss. Regular checkups and dental care, including intra-oral examinations and x-rays are vital in diagnosing RL lesions to minimize the discomfort and complications that may result if they are left untreated.