



Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions (FORLs)

One of the more common dental problems in cats is Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions (FORLs) also called tooth resorption. The cause is unknown although most cats affected are 4 years or older. Other names they can commonly be called are neck lesions, cervical lesions, or cat cavities. Usually the premolars and molars are the most affected teeth, although the incisors and canines are susceptible as well. The lesion starts at the gum line where it will begin to destroy the enamel of the tooth. As it progresses, it begins to resorb the crown of the tooth and its internal structures, which include the dentin and the root canal which contain the nerves and blood vessels to the tooth. This can be very painful. Most cats don't exhibit pain in the early phases, so owners do not become aware of the problem. Some cats will begin to display a jaw "chattering" when pressure is placed on the lesion, from eating or during a physical exam by your veterinarian.

Dental radiographs (x-rays) play a vital role when it comes to FORL's. A physical exam combined with dental radiographs (x-rays) aid in diagnosis, allow the appropriate treatment, and especially since the lesions can be hidden by calculus and gingival inflammation. Treatment of choice by veterinarians and the American Veterinary Dental College recommends entire extraction or intentional root retention with a crown amputation depending on the type which is determined by dental radiographs. At one time FORL's were believed to be comparable to human cavities and could be "filled" or restored, but we now know that even after restoration was done, the lesion continues to resorb and destroy the structures of the tooth.

FORLs are categorized into different stages due to severity.

Stage 1: Enamel defect noted, with mild cementum and/or enamel loss.

Stage 2: Have a significant lesion that extends through the enamel and into the dentin. The root canal is still unaffected. Again dental radiographs are essential to determine if the root canal has been affected.

Stage 3: The cementum, enamel, dentin and root canal are affected and leaving the cat in severe pain and discomfort if they are not treated.

Stage 4: The crown of the tooth is eroded or fractured.

Stage 5: The crown is completely gone and the gingival margin has overgrown the retained root. If the cat seems painful extraction of the retained roots is recommended.

Cats that are affected by FORL's typically go on to have a good prognosis. As a result of being predisposed to having lesions appear again they should have yearly exams and radiographs done to further monitor their mouths for any further complications, unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian.