



Dental X-rays

Dental x-rays are now an integral part of dental procedures. Visual inspection is only useful for assessing the crown of the tooth, we cannot see the root or jaw bone surrounding the tooth without x-ray. Substantial disease and pain can be associated with these areas without any sign of problem on the visible part of the tooth.

Animals often do not show external signs of dental pain as they have evolved to hide signs of discomfort and carry on eating at all costs. Combine the lack of symptoms with potentially normal looking teeth in the mouth, and it can be impossible to find sources of pain such as tooth root abscesses without a dental x-ray picture. Sources of ongoing dental pain can be missed, with animals continuing with pain after a dental procedure.

Extractions following dental xray carry less risk of complication as we are able to assess the tooth in full prior to extraction. Any vet in general practice or a specialist, will have the odd tooth root snap during extraction as they can be very long, thin and fragile. Without x-rays, it can be difficult to locate the fragment for extraction, leading to ongoing inflammation and discomfort if it is not removed entirely.

Assessing anatomy

Dental x-rays allow us to identify:

- Abnormal tooth root shapes – for example, kinked roots that would be hard to remove or prone to snap without prior knowledge.
- Missing roots or extra roots – When extracting premolars and molars, we have to cut the tooth into separate pieces before removing each root individually. Extra or missing roots affect where we partition the tooth. Without this knowledge, roots can be more prone to break as a complication.
- Lack of jaw bone – some teeth make up the majority of the lower jaw which means little bone support is left during and after removal of teeth. These animals can be at very high risk of jaw fracture and may be referred to a dental specialist for removal of problematic teeth – small breeds are most at risk.
- Missing teeth – sometimes teeth do not erupt properly but can sit in the jaw bone for years. These can be prone to a painful and dangerous development into a dentigerous cyst that can cause extensive damage to the bone and jaw.

Assessing disease

Dental x-rays allow us to see disease in the parts of the tooth we cannot see with our eye. For example:

- Periodontal disease – the bone around the tooth root can recede, reduce the attachment of the tooth to the bone, and expose sensitive/painful parts of the tooth.
- Tooth root abscesses – these can occur even if the visible part of the tooth looks healthy and can be incredibly painful. Antibiotics alone are not likely to solve the problem – tooth extraction is required.
- Resorptive lesions – part of the disease process affects the root - knowing this is vital for correct treatment.
- Tooth trauma – to assess if the tooth needs removal or can benefit from a root canal procedure.

We are strong advocates for the importance of a dental x-ray, and we hope, from the examples above, that you will also see the benefit too. Our vets have the most up-to-date digital dental x-rays and will use them on every case where appropriate unless specifically declined by the owner. Dental radiography requires skill, time to perform and time to interpret, but it is invaluable in reducing dental complications and assessing the whole mouth.

If you would like to book a dental x-ray for your pet, please contact us on 01626 835002.