

The Mistake Many Pet Owners Make After This Injury

Most dogs won't show obvious signs when this injury happens, which is why many pet parents handle it the wrong way. Learn what to watch for, how to respond, and why early action makes all the difference.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Tooth fractures in dogs are more common than most people think and often happen when dogs chew on hard objects like antlers, rocks, or rigid toys that are tougher than their enamel
- Warning signs include chewing on one side, blood on toys, swollen gums, tooth discoloration, or a sudden refusal to eat hard food
- Treatment options vary depending on the severity of the break and the dog's age, but may include extraction, root canal therapy, or vital pulp therapy to save the tooth and prevent infection
- Prevention comes down to safe chewing habits; offer softer chew toys, avoid rough tug-of-war, brush your dog's teeth regularly, book annual dental checkups, and supervise their chewing time
- If you suspect a fracture, don't wait it out. Even a tiny crack leads to serious problems like infection, abscesses, or jawbone damage if left untreated. Early evaluation makes all the difference

A broken tooth in your dog isn't something to brush off. The most common mistake pet owners make is assuming it's no big deal because their dogs keep eating, stay active, and don't show obvious signs of pain, resulting in delayed treatment. However, a cracked or broken tooth is painful, invites infection, and if ignored, leads to deeper problems like jawbone damage, abscesses, or chronic inflammation.

How you respond in the first hours and days directly affects your dog's outcome. Keep reading to learn what to look for, what to do at home, when to get professional help, and what to expect from treatment and recovery.

Why This Injury Happens More Often Than You Think

Dogs love to chew. It's instinctive and healthy but also risky when the wrong objects are involved. Most dental fractures happen when a dog chews something too hard. Pet owners often assume that a chew must be safe because it's sold in a pet store. But that's not true.

Here's the test: If you can't bend it, flex it, or leave an indent with your fingernail, it's too hard for your dog's teeth. That includes common items like:¹

- Antlers
- Yak chews

- Hooves
- Nylabones and hard plastic bones
- Cooked bones
- Rocks
- Ice cubes

A dog's tooth enamel is about one-tenth the thickness of a human's. So, when two hard surfaces meet, their tooth usually breaks. These injuries are prevalent in dogs between the ages of 3 and 5 years old, when the teeth start to lose elasticity but chewing behavior is still intense.²

Even everyday play can be risky. Games like tug-of-war, especially with heavy resistance or jerking motion, place enough stress on the canines to cause fractures. And the damage might not show up right away. It only becomes apparent later, when the tooth starts to discolor or when the dog quietly starts avoiding toys.^{3,4}

What to Look For (Even When It's Not Obvious)

Tooth fractures in dogs aren't always easy to spot. Some are clean and visible, while others are beneath the gumline or hidden in the back of the mouth. And since it doesn't cause obvious symptoms, most pet parents miss the subtle shifts that signal something's wrong. Here's what to watch for:

- Chewing only on one side
- Blood on toys, food, or water bowls
- Sudden disinterest in hard toys or treats
- Refusing dry food or eating slower than usual
- Swelling under the eye or along the jaw
- A single tooth is building up tartar faster than the others
- Tooth discoloration (gray, pink, purple, or chalk-white)
- Foul odor from the mouth
- Pulling away when the side of the face is touched

What to Do if You Suspect a Broken Tooth

If you discover or suspect your dog has a broken tooth, act quickly but carefully. Dogs are experts at hiding pain; what looks like a minor issue may be far more serious beneath the surface. Here's what to do:^{5,6}

- **Stay calm** — Your dog takes emotional cues from you. Staying calm helps keep them from becoming more anxious.
- **Do not try to remove the tooth** — Pulling or prodding risks causing more pain and damage.
- **Inspect gently** — If your dog allows it, look for cracks, bleeding, swelling, or pain when you touch their muzzle.

- **Take away hard toys or foods** — Remove anything your dog might chew that could worsen the break, including switching to soft food to reduce the pressure on the damaged tooth.
- **Do not use human medications** — Never give dogs drugs like ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or other over-the-counter pain relievers, as they are toxic.⁷
- **Call your vet or an emergency clinic** — Describe what you're seeing and ask if your dog needs urgent care or next-available scheduling. A professional should evaluate any broken tooth, even if it looks minor.

Even a fracture that looks small from the outside may involve pulp exposure, infection, or root damage. Quick action helps prevent long-term complications and keeps your dog from silently suffering.

What the Vet Will Do — Diagnostic and Treatment Options

At the clinic, your vet will begin with a full exam and often recommend dental X-rays to assess the damage beneath the gumline. The type of fracture, the location of the tooth, and whether the pulp is exposed determine the course of action. Treatment options typically include:^{8,9}

- **Extraction** — Removal is the simplest and most effective solution if the tooth is beyond repair, infected, or fractured below the gumline. Most dogs recover quickly and return to eating normally within a day or two, on soft food initially, then gradually back to regular meals. Recovery usually involves two weeks of soft food and limited access to anything that could reopen the surgical site, including chew toys and tug plays.
- **Root canal therapy** — If the tooth's structure is still intact and the goal is to preserve functionality (especially for a large canine), a root canal is often the preferred option. This procedure removes the infected or exposed pulp, seals the canal, and reinforces the tooth. In some cases, a crown may be added (either metal or tooth-colored), depending on how much of the original crown is missing and how active the dog is.

This option prevents further infection and keeps the chewing surface intact. Recovery is typically quick, with most dogs resuming normal habits within a few days. The success rate for veterinary root canals is around 96%, with a small percentage needing future follow-up.¹⁰

- **Vital pulp therapy** is an option for younger dogs, typically under 18 months, when a tooth has been recently fractured. The goal of this treatment is to keep the tooth alive. A thin pulp layer is removed to eliminate surface bacteria and inflamed tissue, then a medicated dressing is applied to support healing.

A protective layer of dental composite is placed over the site to seal and protect it. While this approach preserves the living tooth, it may still require a root canal later if complications develop.¹¹

Some dogs, like those with heart conditions, those at the extremes of age, or those with other health complications, may not be good candidates for surgery. In those cases, your vet may recommend pain management or other palliative measures, though these won't provide a long-term fix.

How to Protect Your Dog from Dental Injuries

Dental injuries are often avoidable. By making key changes to how your dog chews, plays, and eats, you significantly lower the risk of another fracture and other dental issues. These strategies help protect your dog's teeth and support long-term oral health.^{12,13}

- **Avoid tug-of-war with hard toys** — The pulling motion, especially between you and your dog, stresses their teeth and leads to cracks or breaks. If you play tug, use soft, flexible toys and let your dog lead the motion.
- **Use softer chew toys** — Choose items that are firm but not rock-hard. Look for chew toys with a slight give, such as those made from safe, nontoxic rubber or soft natural fibers. Always supervise chewing and rotate toys to prevent overuse.
- **Brush your dog's teeth regularly** — Daily brushing helps reduce plaque buildup, supports gum health, and keeps enamel surfaces smooth. Use a soft-bristled brush and a toothpaste made specifically for dogs.
- **Schedule annual dental cleanings** — Professional cleanings allow for a thorough mouth evaluation, including X-rays to catch fractures or infections beneath the surface.
- **Watch for dead teeth** — Discoloration indicates the tooth is no longer alive and needs to be treated as an open fracture.

Keep in mind that good dental hygiene supports far more than your dog's oral health. It also plays a role in overall well-being and longevity. Small, consistent habits make a lasting difference.

Sources and References

^{1,2,3,9,10,13} [Doyslestown Veterinary Hospital and Holistic Pet Care, February 4, 2025](#)

⁴ [Old Derby Animal Hospital, What to Do if Your Dog Has a Broken Tooth](#)

⁵ [Dr. Buzby's ToeGrips, February 5, 2024](#)

^{6,8,11,12} [VCA Animal Hospitals, Fractured Teeth in Dogs](#)

⁷ [VCA Animal Hospitals, Ibuprofen Poisoning in Dogs](#)
