



DENTITION STUDY

MISPLACED DECIDUOUS LOWER CANINE TEETH IN IRISH WOLF HOUND PUPPIES - A GUIDE FOR VETERINARIANS -

The information contained in this leaflet is not intended to dispute the findings of veterinary dental specialists, in respect of the average dog. All quotes are from “Wiggs Veterinary Dentistry” (except *)

INTRODUCTION

Wolfhounds are rapidly growing giant sighthounds, rarely reaching full maturity before 3 years of age. From a birth-weight of 1lb, it is not uncommon for an Irish Wolfhound puppy to reach 100lbs by 6 months. The long, relatively narrow head of the Irish Wolfhound is considered Dolichocephalic, with the muzzle typically longer than the back skull. This differs from the Mesati/Mesocephalic type, with foreface and head of more or less equal length, therefore representing the ‘average’ dog with ‘normal’ growth pattern. Most canine orthodontists are not trained to recognise developmental differences relating to individual breeds (other than those which apply to flat-faced breeds). The Brachycephalic breeds are considered as being outside the ‘norm’ and the IWHG’s contention is that Dolichocephalic breeds should also be afforded the same consideration, but at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Temporary malocclusions during the rapid growth of this breed, whether due to skeletal influences or the abnormal positioning of teeth are not uncommon, especially in puppies of 8-16 weeks. However, we are hearing of an increasing number of vets suggesting referrals to canine orthodontists, due to lingually displaced mandibular canine teeth being noted at the time of puppy vaccinations. Yet this is almost always a temporary and transient problem in this breed, which corrects itself as the puppy grows.

Our evidence suggests that early surgical intervention is in most cases, wholly inappropriate for Irish Wolfhound puppies and furthermore may be potentially detrimental to breed welfare.

Setting aside the overshot jaw as a completely different condition, the information gathered so far by the IWHG’s observational study, suggests that in the Irish Wolfhound, the presence of lingually displaced mandibular deciduous canines in young puppies, cannot be considered a reliable predictive indicator for how the permanent teeth will occlude.

Improving the occlusion of the permanent teeth is one of three reasons cited by canine orthodontists as an indicator for early surgical intervention to remove misplaced deciduous lower canine teeth.

This reason has even been proven as flawed, by veterinary dental specialists themselves.

From “Wiggs Veterinary Dentistry” :- ***“If the hereditary influence is for a specific jaw malocclusion, this procedure will not change the outcome.”***

Research shows that the removal of deciduous lower canines is **less than 20% effective** in promoting any beneficial effect on the eruption and occlusion of the permanent teeth. In addition - ***“When considering deciduous extraction, the owner should always be informed that while reasonable precautions are being taken to minimize potential damage to the permanent teeth, problems may still occur. These vary from minimal pitting of the enamel to major structural defects, to complete relocation of the tooth.”***

- **The puppy might achieve a normal occlusion as an adult (with or without surgery)**
- **Early removal of deciduous teeth could have a deleterious effect on the permanent teeth**
- **Post-op pain, possible infection, damage to lower jaw, further corrective surgery required etc.**

Another concern often raised by dental specialists is that by remaining in place, misaligned lower canines could have an undesirable effect on jaw development. Removal of the teeth would therefore prevent **‘adverse dental interlock’**. The contention is that the misplaced teeth may form holes or pits in the gums and palate, ‘locking’ them into an adverse position; or the teeth themselves may malocclude against each other and prevent the jaws from meeting more comfortably.

Apart from the fact that the foregoing scenario pre-supposes that animals keep their mouths clamped shut most of the time, it does not take into consideration that

- a Wolfhound puppy's head lengthens by at least FOUR inches between the ages of 3 - 6 months.
- the rapid growth of the jaws causes consequent and ongoing movement of the deciduous teeth, during the time they are designed to be naturally jettisoned anyway.
- photographic evidence shows that impinging deciduous teeth are not retained in the same position long enough to cause significant disruption to the growth of the jaws.

Based on information documented by canine dental experts and also gathered by this study, it is evident that Adverse Dental Interlock can be discounted as a meaningful concern in the Irish Wolfhound.

Which leaves us to address the question of PAIN

Puppies of breeds which exhibit normal growth patterns, may experience pain due to poorly occluding deciduous teeth, especially if the lower canines are in roughly the same position for 3-4 months and are causing severe damage to the tissues of the mouth.

However, since the deciduous mandibular canines of Irish Wolfhound puppies are in a constant state of flux, it is unlikely that they will experience prolonged, or consistent discomfort, beyond that which would be associated with regular teething. Any indentations in the gum or palate usually heal on a weekly basis, as the teeth advance forward and outward with the natural growth of the jaw.

As mentioned above, most animals especially dogs, do not hold their mouths tightly shut when at rest, regardless of whether it is painful or not to do so. Teething in general can be painful, so as with any transient pain, surely it is best to attempt to manage it until resolved, i.e. when the deciduous teeth are shed naturally, rather than subject a very young puppy to an operation to remove healthy teeth (after which he will require pain relief!)

Dr. Alexander Reiter, (Head of the Dentistry and Oral Surgery Service at University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine) believes that the discomfort of puppy teething is often over dramatised. He advocates that if the puppy is still engaging in normal activities like eating, drinking, socialising, grooming and exploring, then it's unlikely there is a serious problem.

However, he does go on to say, "If the dog isn't doing some of these things and the pain or discomfort is affecting his quality of life, then the puppy may need to see the vet." *

- The removal of healthy but misaligned deciduous lower canine teeth in an IW puppy of less than 4 months old, should be considered as unnecessary for any reason - apart from if the puppy is in such severe discomfort, that it seriously impacts on his/her well-being.
- A "wait and see" approach, with appropriate pain management, is not only less invasive, it is considerably more humane.

The IWHG therefore urges you to take a balanced view and weigh up the efficacy of short term pain management (if/when necessary) against the possible complications that can arise from *any* surgery.

RISKS vs BENEFITS

- The removal of deciduous lower canines will not guarantee or promote, the correct eruption and occlusion of the permanent teeth in any breed.
- The removal of deciduous lower canines may cause damage to the tooth buds of the permanent teeth and result in the need for further corrective procedures being deemed necessary.
- The cumulative effects of several surgeries at such a young age and the potential for these to have a deleterious effect on heart function - in a breed prone to heart irregularities - has to be a very serious consideration. As sighthounds, Wolfhounds are often sensitive to both to the anaesthesia and the opiates widely used in canine surgery.

A natural development, (with appropriate pain management if needed), especially if it results in a good occlusion, is preferable to opting for several surgeries to potentially arrive at the same end result.

The IWHG hopes this may prove a persuasive argument in encouraging members of the veterinary profession, to view the oral development of Irish Wolfhounds as an exception to the rule.