

How Many Teeth Should Your Pup Have – and When Do They Appear?

Discover how many teeth your dog should have, and why understanding their dental milestones is key to protecting their lifelong health and comfort.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Adult dogs should have forty-two teeth; knowing this helps you spot early signs of dental problems like missing, damaged, or improperly erupting teeth
- Puppies develop twenty-eight baby teeth before transitioning to adult teeth between 3.5 and 7 months, making teething an important stage to monitor for discomfort or retained teeth
- Each tooth type — incisors, canines, premolars, and molars — plays a unique role in gripping, tearing, chewing, and grinding, supporting natural behaviors and overall health
- Dental disease affects most dogs over age three, making early prevention and proper care essential to avoid painful conditions like periodontal disease, decay, and tooth loss
- Regular brushing, safe chew choices, professional cleanings and prompt attention to symptoms help protect your dog's mouth, improving comfort, longevity, and long-term health

Your dog's smile does more than melt your heart — it offers clues to their health, comfort, and overall well-being. When you understand how many teeth dogs have, how those teeth grow and change, and how each type of tooth works, you are better prepared to support lifelong oral health. Your dog depends on you to protect their mouth from disease, damage, and avoidable pain. That starts with knowing what is normal inside that toothy grin and what is not.

Understanding How Many Teeth Dogs Have

Dogs may not brush or floss on their own, but they still depend on a full, healthy set of teeth to eat, play, explore and communicate. Knowing how many teeth your dog should have helps you spot problems early.

Adult dogs have forty-two permanent teeth, with twenty in the upper jaw and twenty-two in the lower jaw.¹ This number stays the same regardless of breed or size, meaning a tiny Chihuahua is equipped with the same total number of adult teeth as a Great Dane. These teeth include four types: incisors, canines, premolars, and molars. Each type has a specific shape and purpose, and together they create a well-designed system for chewing, grabbing, tearing, and grinding.

Understanding the normal tooth count also helps you recognize when a tooth is missing, broken or failing to grow in correctly. Because hidden dental disease is extremely common, especially in adult dogs, being aware of your dog's ideal tooth count is a simple but powerful tool for protecting their health.

How Many Teeth Do Puppies Have?

Just like human babies, puppies start life with no visible teeth. Their first tiny teeth begin to push through the gums at 3 to 4 weeks of age.²

By the time puppies reach 3 to 5 months, most have a complete set of twenty-eight puppy teeth, also called deciduous or baby teeth. These include incisors, canines, and premolars — but no molars, because molars only appear as permanent adult teeth.³

Many puppies swallow their baby teeth while eating or playing, which is normal and harmless. You might find an occasional tooth on the floor or in a toy, or a small spot of blood on their gums when they lose a tooth, but most of the time it goes unnoticed.

Some small or toy breeds may take longer to develop and shed teeth, and these dogs are more likely to experience retained baby teeth — teeth that fail to fall out as the adult teeth come in; which may appear as two teeth close together or in more severe cases as a double row of teeth.⁴ This can lead to overcrowding, painful pressure and a higher risk of dental disease if not corrected, as excess tartar can accumulate more easily between the crowded teeth and be more difficult to remove with brushing.

The Transition from Puppy Teeth to Adult Teeth

The teething phase is one of the most memorable and sometimes challenging stages of puppyhood. Puppies typically begin losing their baby teeth at 3.5 to 4 months old, and the process usually ends by 6 to 7 months, when all forty-two adult teeth are in place.⁵ Here is the general order in which puppy teeth fall out:

1. **Incisors** — The front teeth, usually fall out first.
2. **Canines** — The longer “fang-like” teeth used for grabbing and tearing food, fall out next.
3. **Premolars** — The main teeth used for chewing along with the molars, fall out after this.
4. **Molars** — The rest of the main teeth used for chewing emerge as adult teeth only.

Teething can cause some gum tenderness, chewing and drooling, but it should not cause extreme pain or swelling. If your puppy seems unusually uncomfortable or you notice persistent baby teeth that are not falling out, especially if an adult tooth is trying to erupt in the same spot, your veterinarian should examine their mouth.

What Each Type of Dog Tooth Does

Dogs rely on a variety of teeth to handle different jobs. Understanding each type helps you recognize how essential it is to keep all forty-two adult teeth healthy and strong.^{6,7,8}

- **Incisors: the small gripping teeth** — Incisors are the small, narrow teeth at the very front of your dog’s mouth. Puppies and adults both have six incisors on the top and six on the bottom.

Dogs use these teeth for picking up and holding objects, grooming their coat, or scraping or nibbling food. These front teeth are often the first to collect tartar buildup and may be the first to become loose with periodontal disease, making them a key area to watch during brushing routines.

- **Canines: the long, pointed “fangs”** — Canine teeth are the sharp, slightly curved teeth found just behind the incisors. Dogs have four canines in total, two on top and two on the bottom.

These teeth are built for tearing food, gripping objects, carrying, and pulling items, and communicating body language. A dog may show its canine teeth when feeling threatened or defensive, which is why reading body language is essential for safety.

- **Premolars: the shearing teeth** — Behind the canines sit the premolars. Adult dogs have sixteen premolars, eight on each jaw. These teeth help dogs shred food, chew treats, and tear through tougher textures.

Premolars include the large carnassial teeth, which act like scissors to shear food into manageable pieces. Because dogs chew most toys and bones with these teeth, they are prone to fractures if your dog chews something too hard such as bones or antlers.

- **Molars: the grinding teeth** — Molars sit at the back of the mouth. Adult dogs have ten molars in total, four on the top and six on the bottom. These wide, flat teeth help dogs grind food, break down meat, and crunch hard treats. Since puppies have no baby molars, these adult molars erupt without replacing deciduous teeth.

Combined, all four types of teeth form a complete system that allows dogs to bite, tear, grip, chew, and express natural behaviors.

Why Dental Health Matters Throughout Life

A healthy mouth supports far more than chewing. Dogs use their teeth for almost everything — carrying toys, exploring the world, grooming themselves and interacting with other dogs. When teeth hurt or become damaged, your dog’s quality of life can drop quickly.

Unfortunately, dental disease is extremely common. More than 80% of dogs over age 3 develop some form of dental disease, including inflamed gums or early tooth decay.⁹ Without early care, small problems can become painful and serious.

Reasons Dogs Lose Adult Teeth

While it is normal for puppies to lose baby teeth, adult dogs should not lose teeth under normal conditions. If you notice missing or loose adult teeth, something is wrong — and prompt treatment is essential. Here are the most common causes of adult tooth loss.

- **Periodontal disease** — This refers to infection and inflammation of the gums and supporting tissues and is the No. 1 cause of tooth loss in adult dogs.¹⁰

Poor dental hygiene allows plaque to harden into tartar. As bacteria spread under the gumline, they cause gum recession, bone loss and weakening of the tooth’s support structures. Eventually the body may reject the damaged tooth, leading to pain and infection. Severe dental disease has been linked to health problems involving the heart, kidneys, and liver because oral bacteria can enter the bloodstream. This is usually apparent first with the front incisors or the smaller premolar teeth in dogs that have periodontal disease.

- **Trauma and chewing damage** — Dogs love to chew, but some objects — especially dense mineral or bone materials such as beef or pork bones or antlers — are so hard that they can fracture or break teeth, more so if

your dog is a heavy chewer. Common causes include:

- Chewing extremely hard toys or bones
- Dogs that chew rocks or inappropriate objects
- Falls or accidents
- Forceful impact during rough play

Broken teeth often expose the nerve, causing significant pain and raising the risk of infection.

- **Tooth decay** — Dogs experience wear and tears in their mouths at a faster rate than humans. They use their teeth to pick up and carry objects, tear through toys and chew on treats. All of this can contribute to decay.

Some breeds, especially small breeds and Greyhounds, are more prone to rapid tooth deterioration, sometimes needing multiple extractions over their lifetime. Removing diseased teeth often provides immediate relief and improves comfort significantly.

Understanding Retained Baby Teeth

Retained baby teeth occur when a puppy tooth does not fall out as expected while the adult tooth grows in. This creates overcrowding and abnormal positioning, which can trap food, increase tartar buildup, cause pain, and lead to gum disease or bite issues.

Small breed dogs (Maltese, Yorkies, Toy Poodles) and brachycephalic breeds (French Bulldogs, Pugs, Shi Tzus) are most likely to develop retained teeth. This more commonly affects the incisors and canine teeth. Experts consider it a genetic issue that usually requires surgical removal to prevent long-term complications.¹¹

How to Prevent Tooth Loss and Keep Your Dog's Teeth Healthy

While dental problems are common, most are preventable with early, consistent care. Here are the most effective ways to support your dog's dental health.¹²

- **Brush your dog's teeth regularly** — Brushing is the single most important habit for preventing tartar buildup. Use a dog-specific toothbrush and toothpaste, since human toothpaste can contain toxic ingredients such as xylitol and be harmful to dogs. Daily brushing is ideal, but even a few times per week makes a significant difference.

Focus on the outer surfaces of the teeth, especially the canines and premolars, where plaque tends to accumulate the fastest.

- **Provide safe chewing options** — Dogs naturally use their teeth to explore and relieve stress, but they need safe chew items to avoid fractures. Avoid extremely hard items like cooked bones, antlers, or hard nylon toys. These can crack teeth, especially the premolars and molars used for chewing. Instead, choose dental chews or treats designed to help reduce plaque without risking injury. If feeding the raw diet, you can also try raw meaty bones to help with dental tartar. Raw bones are not as brittle as cooked bones and can naturally help with tartar removal but still have the potential to crack teeth in a heavy chewer so monitoring is recommended. Always supervise your dog when giving them an item for chewing to make sure they do not swallow it and do not leave them alone with the chew item.

- **Maintain your dog's oral health and microbiome with supplements** — Dogs with severe dental disease and halitosis (bad breath) often have different oral bacteria in their mouth than dogs with a healthy mouth. You may want to test the microbiome in your dog's mouth to see if it is unbalanced or make sure your dog is getting a daily probiotic in their diet. You can use a natural supplement such as kefir or goat milk, but there are some probiotics made to specifically target oral health. These may be added to your pet's water or food. You also may want to use a product containing kelp which is known to help reduce plaque and tartar buildup. Other supplements may include specific herbal therapy or mineral supplements from your holistic vet to help with gingivitis and to maintain the mineral structure of the teeth.
- **Schedule regular veterinary cleanings** — Professional dental cleanings allow veterinarians to remove tartar under the gumline, identify (and remove) hidden decay or diseased teeth, and prevent infections.

Routine cleanings under anesthesia help protect your dog's mouth before disease takes hold. Your dog's annual wellness exam is the perfect time to discuss dental health with your veterinarian. If you are going to a holistic veterinarian, they may offer alternative treatments such as laser therapy and ozone therapy to help keep your pet's mouth healthy.

Watch for Signs of Trouble

Changes in your dog's mouth can be subtle at first. Consult with your integrative veterinarian if you notice:

- Bad breath that worsens over time
- Difficulty chewing
- Dropping food
- Bleeding gums
- Loose or missing teeth
- Facial swelling
- Pawing at the mouth

Dogs rarely show pain openly, and usually will still eat despite tooth pain, so even slight changes deserve attention. While the goal is to preserve all adult teeth, sometimes extractions are necessary to restore comfort and prevent infection. Dogs can adapt surprisingly well, even eating normally without teeth if needed. Removing painful, decayed teeth often improves appetite, energy, and mood.

Keeping the rest of the mouth clean becomes even more important if your dog has lost teeth in the past.

Final Thoughts

Your dog's teeth tell a story — not just about what they eat or chew, but about their health and comfort every day. With forty-two powerful adult teeth, your dog depends on you to help keep their mouth clean, strong, and disease-free. When you understand what's normal and how dental problems develop, you are better prepared to act early, prevent complications and give your dog the long, healthy life they deserve.

Sources and References

[1,2,7,9 Oak Glen Animal Hospital, How many teeth do dogs have?](#)

[3,5,8 Fetch, January 26, 2026](#)

[4,6,10,11,12 PetMD, April 8, 2024](#)
